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Svetla Baloutzova

Demography and Nation

Social Legislation and Population Policy in Bulgaria, 1918–1944

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Svetla Baloutzova



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CONTENTS

Transliteration table of Bulgarian Cyrillic	ix
List of Tables	x
Acknowledgements	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
1. Outlining the problem	1
THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH	1
POPULATION AND POPULATION ANXIETIES FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	6
2. Methodology	11
APPROACHES: THE “REGENERATED” NARRATIVE	11
AGENTS OF RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	13
INSTRUMENTS OF RESEARCH	15
GENERAL LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	15
SOURCES	16
<i>Parliamentary minutes and parliamentary appendices</i>	16
<i>Archival units</i>	17
<i>Mass media: Newspapers and magazines</i>	19
<i>Independent publications</i>	21
3. A historical outline of the period under investigation	21
THE PATH TO NEUILLY (1919)	21
IDEOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS OF THE ERA	26
4. Social and demographic structure of interwar Bulgaria	32
5. A history of Bulgarian legislation—an outline	36

PART I REGENERATING A DEFEATED NATION

Chapter 1

Building up a Maternal and Child Healthcare Service	43
1. An “orange” start: The BANU’s Bill for People’s Health (1923)	43
AN “ORANGE” IDEOLOGY OF HEALTHCARE	44
NON-CODIFIED PROVISIONS FOR MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTHCARE	52
2. The Democratic Alliance and the 1929 Law for People’s Health	58
LEGISLATIVE INTRODUCTION OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE IN BULGARIA	58
THE 1929 LAW FOR PEOPLE’S HEALTH AND ITS HISTORICAL LEGACY	61
“THE WAY THEY SAW IT”: THE PROBLEM OF “WISHFUL” SOCIAL HYGIENE	64
CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE	68
3. Fertility decrease and the rediscovery of state welfare	74
THE FAILURE OF THE PROPAGANDA APPROACH	74
THE LEGAL REVERSAL	78

Chapter 2

Public Assistance	83
1. State protection of the family: The privileged child	84
THE 1934 DECREE-LAW FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AND ITS LEGISLATIVE AFTERMATH	84
2. Legislation on family allowances in Bulgaria	89
INTRODUCING FAMILY ALLOWANCES IN BULGARIA—A HISTORICAL OUTLINE ...	89
THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE DISCOURSE	90
THE DECREE FOR FAMILY ALLOWANCES (1942)	94
BINDING SOCIAL WELFARE AND PUBLIC SECURITY	98
3. The disadvantaged child: The Law for Children Born Outside Marriage and Their Avowal, and for Adoption, November 1940	100
EARLY LEGAL DEBATES AND MODERNIZATION	103
IN THE NAME OF THE CHILD AND ITS MOTHER, AND ... SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS	108
MOTHERS’ RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S ISSUES	112
REFORM BILLS (1924–1933)	114
ILLEGITIMACY AND MEDIA RESPONSE	120
THE LEGAL BREAKTHROUGH (NOVEMBER 1940)	122

PART II TOWARDS PRONATALISM

Chapter 3

Demography, Media Representations, and Parliamentary

Discourse	127
1. The “discovery” of birth decline	128
2. Demographers on the “collapsing” demographic trend	133
3. Mass media responses to fertility decline	141
ETHNIC IMBALANCE AND MILITARY ALARM	141
POPULATION GROWTH OR POVERTY CONCERNS?	148
THE IMAGE OF THE “NEW” FAMILY	157
4. Early parliamentary alarm about birth decline	162

Chapter 4

Activities “From Below”: The League of *Mnogodetni*,

Child-Rich Parents	169
1. Historical overview	169
2. Organization	176
NETWORKS AND NETWORK ACTIVITIES	176
CONGRESSES AND SYMBOLISM	178
MANAGEMENT AND MEMBERSHIP	179
ROLE MODELS	182
3. Combating poverty	187
CHILD ALLOWANCES, TAX-REVISIONS, AND RAILWAY FARE DISCOUNTS	188
APPEALS FOR LAND REDISTRIBUTION AND JUSTICE	193

Chapter 5

Petür Gabrovski and the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian

Families	207
1. Ideological background	207
2. The Law for Large, <i>Mnogodetni</i> Bulgarian Families	215
LEGISLATIVE PREPARATIONS	215
INFLUENCES AND MOTIVATION	217
DRAFTS AND COMMENTS	222
OFFICIAL ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS	226
THE FINAL VERSION	234

CONTENTS

3. The bachelors' tax controversy	236
4. The legal aftermath	243
CONCLUSIONS	245
1. Legislation on the family and children (1918–1944)	245
2. An overview of motives—"The way they saw it"	246
3. Privileged and underprivileged target groups of social legislation	248
4. Political participants and pressure activists	250
5. Aftermath	251
Bibliography	253
Index	277

TRANSLITERATION TABLE OF BULGARIAN CYRILLIC

(according to the University of Cambridge Online Catalogue)¹

А	A
Б	B
В	V
Г	G
Д	D
Е	E
Ж	ZH
З	Z
И	I
Й	I
К	K
Л	L
М	M
Н	N
О	O
П	P
Р	R
С	S
Т	T
У	U
Ф	F
Х	KH
Ц	TS
Ч	CH
Ш	SH
Щ	SHT
Ъ	Û
Ю	IU
Я	IA

¹ The transliteration of the names of Bulgarian authors whose work has been published into English has been preserved as in the original.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1. Crude births and rates of reproduction, Bulgaria	34
Table 1.2. Percentage of age groups single in 1900	34
Table 2.1. Gender specific mortality rates in Bulgaria in the period 1906–1929	79
Table 4.1. Distribution of population in different age-groups per 1000 population	129
Table 4.2. Number of legitimate live-born children per 1000 married women up to the age of forty-five	134
Table 4.3. Birth rates, mortality rates, and natural population growth per 1000 in the period 1911–1940	138
Table 4.4. Population growth of Bulgaria's major confessional groups for 1933–1936	144
Table 4.5. Population growth per 1000 of population for the period 1904–1936	145
Table 4.6. Population decline for the period 1909–1928	146
Table 4.7. Comparative population growth (%) in Europe and in the Balkans	156
Table 5.1. Cultivated land, permanently employed population in agriculture, capital, and income according to size of the agricultural farms in 1934	198
Table 5.2. Black-market producers' prices for crops in 1944 (levs per kg)	201
Table 6.1. Bachelor penalty taxation as foreseen in the Law for Encouraging Marriages and Birth Rates, A Project	237
Table 6.2. Bachelor penalty tax as foreseen in the Bill for Large, <i>Mnogodetni</i> Bulgarian Families	237

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INTRODUCTION



1. Outlining the problem

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

In 2005, the European Commission published the Green Paper *Confronting Demographic Change: A New Solidarity between the Generations*, which addressed the latest developments in Europe's demographic situation, and, in particular, outlined the challenges of a new demographic "crisis." The Paper implied a positive correlation between economic performance and population growth, placed in the context of the combination of reduction in birth numbers, ageing, and the dwindling potentials for immigration. The Green Paper noted that the fertility rate within the EU had fallen below the threshold to renew the population (around 2.1 children per woman), and in many Member states below 1.5 children per woman. If the total working age population (15–64) was considered, it was foreseen that over the following two decades, the EU's population would drop by 20.8 million—which, by itself, was said to endanger the potential annual growth in the Gross National Product.¹ An exchange of the experiences of the EU Member states in their national social policies was encouraged to counteract the pessimistic demographic trend. Bulgaria, a small country at the fringe of Southeastern Europe, was among the first to respond to the EU Commission's appeal. By 2006, Bulgaria had already outlined her national demographic strategy for over a decade ahead, in which the socialist legacy of pronatalism was acknowledged.²

¹ Commission of the European Communities, "Communication from the Commission: Green Paper 'Confronting Demographic Change: a New Solidarity between the Generations'" (COM (2005) 94 final, Brussels, 16.03.2005), pp. 2, 5, http://www.berlin-divercity.de/diwiki/images/e/ee/Green_paper_demography.pdf; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

² *National Demographic Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2006–2020* (Sofia, 2007).

Population anxieties are not a peculiar manifestation of a modern or post-modern mind-set, but have had their analogues since antiquity. Throughout the centuries, authorities have invested energy into “engineering” their populations by attempting to regulate the birth and child mortality trends in one direction or another, or by striving to achieve a desired “population quality” design. Whereas at the practical level such efforts seemed to have yielded short-lived results, policy preferences once made may nevertheless exert influence on decisions in the future. Institutional arrangements of an earlier time can self-reinforce historical lines of development, or, albeit in the long run, path dependency may grow less deterministic and be intersected by incidents of change.³ It has become clear that population trends and population management measures in the past need to be assessed and taken into account if current attitudes and governmental responses towards demographic phenomena are to be explained.

The history of the state endeavors of the “Great Powers” to impose control over reproduction and intervene in the family domain has become a well-recognized and prolific topic of academic research. However, while the strategies of France, Germany, Italy, and Britain to influence and regulate demographic behavior have received plentiful attention by social historians for decades, the traditions (or absence of such) in the policy realm of smaller European actors towards their fertility and child mortality rates are under-explored. This dearth of historical awareness may lead in a local frame to the implementation of measures, the choice of which could well bewilder international policy analyzers. At the same time, the paucity of historical information at a broader European level renders the issue of population management in the histories of Europe’s small nations a fascinating and rewarding subject of research.

The present work hopes to contribute to the studies pursued in the European social policy and population domain by channeling scholarly curiosity towards the less known historical path of an East European “newcomer” to the large, twenty-seven member state EU. Within the second half of the twentieth century, Eastern Europe established itself as a political region of

³ Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 414, 416; Gosta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Polity Press, 1990), pp. 26–33; Béla Tomka, *Welfare in East and West: Hungarian Social Security in an International Comparison, 1918–1990* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), p. 19.

codified pronatalist practice aimed to advance population growth.⁴ Concurrently, the ideological determinism of pre-1989 socialist historiography has had the consequence that many of the topics in the region's national past, fully explored in Western historiography, are still awaiting their discovery. Soviet Russia and Ceausescu's Romania are among those "privileged" East European countries whose relatively recent, socialist family and population policies have been favored for analysis due to their pioneering or extreme, Drac(ul)onian natures.⁵ The comparatively balanced family policy of post-Second World War Bulgaria, too, has received a boost of academic interest over the last years.⁶ Yet little is known about the actual origins of Eastern Europe's population fears, which, judging by the example of the West, may be assumed to have had their roots in the pre-socialist era. The initial attempts of the East European countries to manage their populations, as well as the ideological justifications provided for doing so, still fall within the category of historical topics requiring full, in-depth exploration.⁷

⁴ John Besemer, *Socialist Population Politics: The Political Implications of Demographic Trends in the USSR and Eastern Europe* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1980); C.A. McIntosh, *Population Policy in Western Europe: Responses to Low Fertility in France, Sweden and West Germany* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1983), pp. 11–12; M.S. Teitelbaum and J.M. Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline* (London: Academic Press, 1985), p. 103.

⁵ On the history of the family and family policy in Soviet Russia, though less from a population angle, see Wendy Z. Goldman's classic study, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). The latter follows the evolution of Soviet family policy and its reversal from a libertarian state vision of unfettered love and freedom of reproduction to a conservative resurrection of the definitions of family and tight fertility control. On the Romanian socialist version of "radical" pronatalism in both law and practice, see Gail Kligman's well-known work, *The Policy of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶ For instance, see Anelia Kassabova-Dintcheva, *Migration und Familienforschung und Politik: Am Beispiel Bulgariens* [Migration and family studies and policy: A case-study of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Variant, 2000, 2004); Iljia Iliev, "Familie, Ideologie und Politik: Die Grossmutter in der städtischen Familie nach 1945" [Family, ideology and politics: The grandmother in the urban family after 1945], in Ulf Brunnbauer and Karl Kaser (eds.), *Vom Nutzen der Verwandten: Soziale Netzwerke in Bulgarien 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* [The use of relatives: Social networks in Bulgaria in the 19th and 20th c.] (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), pp. 89–114; Ulf Brunnbauer, "Sotsialisticheskite semeistva v Bŭlgariia: mezhdŭ ideologiia i praktika" [Socialist families in Bulgaria: Between ideology and practice], *Bŭlgarska Etnografiia* [Bulgarian ethnography], XX (2001), pp. 40–65; Ulf Brunnbauer and Karin Taylor, "'Creating a socialist way of life': Family and reproduction policies in Bulgaria, 1944–1989," *Continuity and Change*, No. 2 (August 2004), pp. 283–312; Karin Taylor, *Let's Twist Again: Youth and Leisure in Socialist Bulgaria* (Studies on South East Europe, VI) (Berlin–Hamburg–Münster: LIT Verlag, 2006); Ulf Brunnbauer, "Die sozialistische Lebensweise." *Ideologie, Gesellschaft, Familie und Politik in Bulgarien, 1944–1989* ["The socialist lifestyle": Ideology, society, family, and politics in Bulgaria, 1944–1989] (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2007).

⁷ Important, very recent "break-throughs," though from the point of studying attempts at qualitative, racial "engineering" of the national populations in early twentieth-century Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe, are Maria Bucur's case-study of Romania, and M. Turda and P. Weindling's collection embracing research on Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Lands, Estonia, Greece, former Yugoslavia (Croatia), and Bulgaria.

The current work sets itself several interrelated objectives. Its foremost goal is to uncover the early stages of state-instigated policies toward the family and future generations in Eastern Europe by selecting Bulgaria as a case-study. While ever since the late 1920s Bulgaria's overall fertility rate has been on a steady decline, it plummeted steeply below the replacement level in 1990 and has not recovered yet (1.27 and 1.42 in 2005 and 2007, respectively).⁸ As a result, Bulgaria's media and political life presently abounds with troubled demographic analyses, uneasy population forecasts,⁹ and uncoordinated incidents of eager pronatalist appeals.¹⁰ Whereas impor-

For further information, see Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling (eds.), *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2007).

⁸ Giampaolo Lanzieri, *Population in Europe: first results* (Eurostat. Statistics in Focus, 81/2008), p. 6, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-08-081/EN/KS-SF-08-081-EN.PDF; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

For a recent, overall review of trends in Bulgaria's fertility rates, see Vetka Zhekova, "Retrospektiven analiz na razhdaemosta v Bŭlgariia (1900–2001)" [Fertility in Bulgaria—a retrospective analysis (1900–2001)], *Naselenie [Population]*, No. 1–2 (2005), pp. 74–88.

⁹ According to Eurostat data, Bulgaria can anticipate the worst population loss amongst current EU states over the period 2010–2060: a decline of over twenty-five per cent, from 7,564,300 to 5,488,666, which is matched by Lithuanian, Latvian, and to an extent, Romanian negative data projections. See further <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tpso0002>; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

¹⁰ At a governmental level, see the creation in 1997 of the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (*Natsionalen Sŭvet po Etnicheskite i Demografski Vŭprosi*), succeeded in 2004 by the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (*Natsionalen Sŭvet za Sŭtrudnichestvo po Etnicheskite i Demografski Vŭprosi*), with twenty-two regional sub-branches, and under the direct supervision of the Bulgarian government. For further details, see <http://www.nccedi.government.bg/>; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

For further details on scholarly considerations related to Bulgaria's demographic development, see the numerous publications in *Naselenie [Population]*, the journal of the Center for Population Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and in particular, Minko Minkov, "Bŭlgarskite demografi iskat da pomognat za otseliavaneto na bŭlgarina i bŭlgarshtinata" [Bulgarian demographers want to help the Bulgarian national spirit survive], *Naselenie [Population]*, No. 1 (1992), pp. 5–7; "Niama miasto za iliuizii po otnoshnenie na demografskata kriza" [No room for illusions concerning the demographic crisis], *Population*, No. 1 (1993), pp. 7–10; "Demografskata situatsiia v Bŭlgariia" [The demographic situation in Bulgaria], *Population*, No. 3–4 (1995), pp. 7–38; "Demografskata kriza v Bŭlgariia iziskva provezhdaneto na ratsionalna demografska politika" [The demographic crisis in Bulgaria demands the implementation of a rational demographic policy], *Population*, No. 1–2 (2005), pp. 34–55; Vetka Zhekova, "Mnogodetnata razhdaemost na fona na obshhtata brachna razhdaemost v Bŭlgariia (1906–1992)" [Reproductive needs and attitudes of many-children families in Bulgaria (1906–1992)], *Population*, No. 1–2 (1995), pp. 35–45; "Reproduktivni naglasi i motive za razhdane na detsa" [Reproduction attitudes and motivations for child-bearing], *Population*, No. 1–2 (2001), pp. 36–55; Galina Rizova, "Natsionalna politika za semeistvoto" [National family policy], *Population*, No. 2–3, (1996), pp. 61–74; Mariana Keremidchieva, "Politikata za semeistvoto—teoretichni aspekti i vizhdaniia" [Essence and aims of the family policy], *Population*, No. 1–2, (1997), pp. 77–90; Spas Tashev, "Demografski aspekti na sigurnostta" [Demographic aspects of security], *Population*, No. 1–2, (2004), pp. 45–52; Tatyana Kotzeva, Vetka Zhekova, Genoveva Mihova, and Marta Sougareva, "Ekspertna otsenka na demografskite protsesi v Bŭlgariia i nasoki za tŭrsene na effektivno regulirane na neblagopriatnite posleditsi"

tant scholarly work has commenced on the history of child-welfare, especially targeting the pre-1945 voluntary sector,¹¹ and some more general studies have been carried out related to social and welfare legislation before communism,¹² Bulgaria's past policy attitudes toward population issues and toward their quantitative and qualitative expression still awaits unearthing and thorough examination.

Hence, the present study intends to identify those early, state-implemented legislative measures which a few decades later would categorize socialist and post-1990 Bulgaria as a pronatalist, family-and-child-friendly country. Children, their numbers and their "quality," as measured by health and mortality indexes, present the major focus of interest. It is the purpose of this work to arrange the pieces of a bygone legislative jigsaw into a coherent, intelligible whole.

Furthermore, this work aims to reconstruct the atmosphere of budding population concerns at both governmental and popular levels, starting in the aftermath of the First World War and eventually leading to the materialization of Bulgaria's first pronatalist law in 1943. It seeks to explicate the ideological motivation behind the adopted legislation by setting the collection of bills and legal acts in the framework of their idiosyncratic socio-political, cultural and historical discourse. Last but not least, the study aspires to

[Expert evaluation of the demographic processes in Bulgaria and guidelines for effective regulation of the negative effects], *Population*, No. 1–2, (2005), pp. 55–73.

On media reactions to the plummeting birth rate, see the campaign of Radio "Vitosha": "More Bulgarian babies for Bulgaria" (*Poveche bŭlgaričeta za Bŭlgariia*), launched in 2006. For further details, see http://media.actualno.com/news_228319.html; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

¹¹ Kristina Popova, *Natsionalnoto Dete: Blagotvoritelnata i Prosvetna Deinost na Sŭiuza za Zakrila na Detsata v Bŭlgariia, 1925–1944* [The national child: Charity and educational activities of the Union for Child Protection in Bulgaria, 1924–1944] (Sofia: LIK, 1999); "Impure person has no success in life and that is why the one starves": The ideology of the Union for Child Protection in Bulgaria and the appearance of health-educating rhetoric about children in Bulgaria, 1930s–1940s" (Studies on South East Europe, II), in Slobodan Naumović and Miroslav Jovanović (eds.), *Childhood in South East Europe: Historical Perspectives on Growing up in the 19th and 20th Century* (Berlin–Hamburg–Muenster: LIT Verlag, 2004), pp. 149–162.

¹² Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1983) (in particular, pp. 488–489); Roumen Daskalov, *Bŭlgarskoto Obshtestvo 1878–1939. Naselenie, Obshtestvo, Kultura* [Bulgarian society 1878–1939: Population, society, culture], 2 vols. (Sofia: Izdatelska kŭshata Gutenberg, 2005); Mikhail Andreev, *Istoriia na Bŭlgarskata Burzhazna Dŭrzhava i Pravo, 1878–1917* [A history of the Bulgarian bourgeois state and legislation, 1878–1917] (Sofia: Sofi-P, 1993); Veselin Stoev and Veselin Tepavicharov, *Politicheska ta Alternativa: Iuni 1923–4 Ianuari 1926* [The political alternative: June 1923 to 4 January 1926] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski", 1992); Krassimira Daskalova, "Bulgarian women in movement, laws, discourses (1840s–1940s)," *Bulgarian Historical Review*, No. 1–2 (1999), pp. 180–196; Nikola Konstantinov, *Sotsialnoto Osiguruvane v Bŭlgariia, 1888–1951* [Social insurance in Bulgaria, 1888–1951] (Sofia: Natsionalen Osiguritelni Institut, 2001).

lay down a well-grounded and documented foundation of early state interest towards demography and family issues in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe in general, in the hope to facilitate further cross-national and cross-regional comparisons of the manifestation of policies related to population, family and social welfare in the course of European history.

POPULATION AND POPULATION ANXIETIES FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Fear of population fluctuations, of rapid increase or decline, has been a recurrent concern with human civilization over space and time. For the last few centuries, alarm about “underpopulation” or “overpopulation” has periodically loomed up in European thought and governmental policies, linked to feelings of dread and anxiety about the nation’s economic performance or national strength as a whole.¹³ In the mercantilist period, concern at the likelihood of a future fall in numbers arose from the assumption of an inevitable link between population level, workforce supply and prosperity—a belief still prominent in the 1930s. As long as a numerous, young population was equated with an energetic, military force, a low rate of population growth provoked a feeling of angst of invasion and defeat in the event of war.¹⁴ A decline in the national birth trend was frequently paralleled to “depopulation” and perceived as national “degeneration”; hence, official initiatives were undertaken as early as the turn of the twentieth century to look into and confront this evil.¹⁵

¹³ For an excellent collection of original excerpts illustrating the links drawn between economics and demography from antiquity to the twentieth century, see Julian Lincoln Simons (ed.), *The Economics of Population* (New Brunswick—London: Transaction Publishers, 1998). For a broader collection of original essays from the mid-eighteenth century to the late twentieth century, drawing connections between population numbers, the economy, war, human progress and eugenics, colonial expansion, and migration, see Kathleen A. Tobin (ed.), *Politics and Population Control: A Documentary History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Maria Sophia Quine, *Population Politics in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London—New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1–10; M.S. Teitelbaum and Jay M. Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline* (Orlando—Florida—London: Academic Press Inc., 1985), pp. 1–2, 36–39.

¹⁵ The first country to establish a Commission on Depopulation was France in 1902, followed by Britain, with the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration. The Commission was meant to inquire into the high child mortality and low birth rate, both considered as a peril to national security. While their work was short-lived, numerous initiatives followed with a similar purpose. For further information, see the classic sourcebook: Joseph Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1938), pp. 127–128.

Whereas over space and time, authorities kept contemplating or instituting various measures to counteract demographic fluctuations, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries recorded a pronounced sensitivity towards reining in, correcting, and reversing population slumps. The upheavals of the First World War, its high numbers of human casualties, and exceeding infant mortality rates put the population problem forcefully on the European social agenda. In addition, the large scale of economic recession and spreading unemployment and overall poverty led to appeals in the early 1930s for governments to intervene and bolster the welfare of families. Questions regarding the population's qualitative composition, as measured by health and mortality indexes, as well as its reproductive activity as revealed in numbers of births, frequently spread beyond the field of governmental concerns and became a multi-sided process of negotiation between public authorities, concerned citizens, family associations, and religious groups. Adherents of polar ideologies—socialists, fascists, democrats, and Catholics alike—manifested interest in population developments and promoted discussion of “strategic demography” even in the popular media field.¹⁶ Whereas at the turn of the century France was the leading European country to have openly embraced a pronatalist stance, fear of population decline became equally widespread among all European nations within the next decades. Anxious public outcries about falling numbers—commonly bordering on hysteria—enveloped France, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Britain—the latter with a longstanding tradition of Malthusian concerns.¹⁷

Population numbers were interpreted differently at different times and in different cultures, and their reading was legitimated by the national per-

¹⁶ Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Fathers, Families, and the State in France, 1914–1945* (Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 184, 191; Paul Weindling, “Fascism and population in comparative European perspective,” in M.S. Teitelbaum and Jay M. Winter (eds.), *Population and Resources in Western Intellectual Traditions* (New York: The Population Council, *Population and Development Review*, a supplement to Vol. 14, 1988), pp. 102–121; Jay Winter, “Socialism, social democracy, and population questions in western Europe: 1870–1959,” in Teitelbaum and Winter (eds.), *Population and Resources in Western Intellectual Traditions*, pp. 122–146; Marie-Monique Huss, “Pronatalism and the popular ideology of the child in war-time France: The evidence of the picture postcard,” in Richard Wall and Jay Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914–1918*, II ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 329–368.

¹⁷ Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birth Rate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 1–8; Idem, “Eugenics and pronatalism in wartime Britain,” in Wall and Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War*, pp. 369–388.

ception of the country's international position.¹⁸ Fragile European security served as a generator for nervous comparisons of demographic tendencies, either within the nation's social fabric, or between nations and larger geographic regions. Germany's flourishing birth rate and young recruitment pool provoked feverish deliberations in both Britain and France. At the end of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century military worries and imperial weakness—interpreted as “decay”—became common topics for mass panic on both sides of the Channel.¹⁹ At the level of foreign affairs, Germany's intentionally overestimated population numbers were used in the 1930s as a necessary precondition to have the political issue of overpopulation raised on the international arena. Demography became a tool for imperial demands for territorial expansion and the redistribution of colonies. The aspiration to secure and sustain a proper “living-space” (*Lebensraum*), benignly interpreted as the “claim for an equal share of the world's area, or of the world's wealth,” or less comfortably, as the inevitability of “a Great Power to dominate lesser Powers,” permeated the international atmosphere in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰

The “specter of Communism” launched by the Russian Revolution of 1917 likewise unleashed a wave of frenzy, warning of the menace of spreading Bolshevism.²¹ The higher population numbers of alien cultures were seen as a peril, and within a historical frame they revived “memories” of the birth “failure” and the consequent collapse of ancient Rome. The supposed “risk of another Great Invasion westward by the peoples of the East”²² caused marked disquiet in the outlook of the “West,” both from an ideological and “civilization” perspective.

At the same time, population policies were rarely independently justified, as in practice they commonly went along with measures characteristic of welfare reformism. Occasionally, it was merely an explicitly stated population objective which would distinguish “pure” social policy from demo-

¹⁸ McIntosh, *Population Policy in Western Europe*, pp. 43–80.

¹⁹ Teitelbaum and Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline*, pp. 18–35.

²⁰ R.R. Kuczynski, “Living-Space” and Population Problems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), pp. 2–5. For a similar attempt to “export” population masses and imperialistic “grandeur” to the colonies of Franco's Spain, see Mary Nash, “Pronatalism and motherhood in Franco's Spain,” in Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (eds.), *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 160–178, 160, 163.

²¹ Teitelbaum and Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline*, pp. 40–43.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

graphic aspirations.²³ Medical care for mothers and children, financial help to families through housing or economic support (in cash or in kind), tax exemptions and rebates, reduced travel fares, and special school privileges to parents with large progeny served social welfare and demographic purposes alike. Simultaneously, population and welfare schemes could be manipulated for diverse economic, political and ideological goals.²⁴ The early family allowance schemes, augmented by French employers in the period between 1870 and 1914, hoped to curb demands for further increases in male employees' wages and stifle potential unrest amongst workers.²⁵ Similarly, the introduction of marriage loans in Germany in 1933 served manifold economic, racial, demographic, and gender purposes and, by enforcing an ideology of gendered domesticity, was instrumental in stimulating the birth numbers of "pure Aryans," reducing the unemployment rate, and withdrawing young, married women from the labor market.²⁶

Besides the positive, welfare side it exhibited, population policy could easily trespass into murky areas, especially if linked to rigid population planning policies and race engineering. The burgeoning popularity of the idea of race improvement (eugenics) at the turn of the twentieth century fuelled the merger of population anxieties with class and race considerations on the domestic front. As used initially, the term "race" was synonymous with nation, though it could also describe a population of a distinct type or skin color.²⁷ However, by the early 1920s, its German equivalent, *Rassenhygiene* [race hygiene], was in common use, even if its exact translation remained in dispute. The ambiguity revolved around whether "race hygiene" applied to one race or mankind in general and whether it assumed a differential order within the human species, with all the political connotations that came with this.²⁸

²³ Anne Helene Gauthier, *The State and the Family: A Comparative Analysis of Family Policies in Industrialized Countries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 1, 4.

²⁴ Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State*, pp. 245–246.

²⁵ John Macnicol, "Welfare, wages and the family: Child endowment in comparative perspective, 1900–1950," in Roger Cooter (ed.), *In the Name of the Child: Health and Wealth, 1880–1940* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 244–275, esp. 246–251.

²⁶ Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy, 1933–1945* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), p. 17.

²⁷ Graham Loren, *Between Science and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 224.

²⁸ Loren, *Between Science and Values*, p. 224; Christian Promitzer, "'Betwixt and Between': Physical anthropology in Bulgaria and Serbia until the end of the First World War," in Reinhard Johler, Chr. Marchetti and Monique Scheer (eds.), *Doing Anthropology in Wartime and War Zones* (Proceedings of the conference in Tübingen, 7–9 December 2006) (forthcoming).

While in the 1920s, eugenics still enjoyed popularity in cultures and societies as diverse as Germany, the United States, and the Soviet Union, their ideological framework added to an accumulative divergence in how the concept was interpreted. Hierarchical, discriminatory translations became more pronounced in Germany, kindled by the increasing power of right-wing forces. In contrast, by the 1930s, Marxism's egalitarian ideology downgraded the role of eugenics from engineering human genetics to its utilization in agriculture.²⁹

The credibility of selective eugenics was reinforced by fear of differential fertility among social classes and ethnic groups and its perceived negative impact on the nation's future.³⁰ As it was "discovered" that the "under-class" of the poor, asocial, and antisocial reproduced at pronouncedly higher rates than the intellectuals and better-off, the fertility of the "less abled" was felt to endanger the power of the nation. Measures designed to curb undesired fertility, such as medical examination before marriage, marriage prohibition, enforced abortion or sterilization were deemed suitable measures to restrict the "unrestrained breeding" of the unfit in both Nazi Germany and in the liberal democracy of the United States. In Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain the strong authority of the Catholic Church and a series of papal encyclicals against the fusion of biology and ethics rendered negative eugenic provisions unpopular.³¹ In the field of population and family policy, this brought Catholic countries closer to the egalitarian and universal family policies adopted by the Soviet Union in the pre-Second World War period.³²

How, then, did a small country with a distinctly agricultural economy and a traditional, universal marriage pattern react to the declining numbers of its population in the turbulent context of the interwar period? What social strategies and population considerations did it adopt to ensure the common, national good? Moreover, what pattern of policy legacy did it

²⁹ Loren, *Between Science and Values*, pp. 225–226, 240–246.

³⁰ Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, pp. 11–16.

³¹ Antoine Prost, "Catholic conservatives, population, and the family in twentieth century France," in M.S. Teitelbaum and Jay M. Winter (eds.), *Population and Resources in Western Intellectual Traditions*, pp. 147–164; Nash, "Pronatalism and motherhood in Franco's Spain," pp. 169–170.

³² David L. Hoffman, "Mothers in the motherland: Stalinist pronatalism in its pan-European context," *Journal of Social History*, XXXIV, No. 1 (2000), pp. 35–54.

leave to the future generations of policy-makers? This is the story which the present work sets out to unfold and tell.

2. Methodology

APPROACHES: THE “REGENERATED” NARRATIVE

The largely unknown documentary background to Bulgarian history raises certain methodological doubts: should evidence on Bulgarian interwar legislation on population and social policy be analyzed within the extant historiography framework (i.e., of other countries); should it be approached and inspected from a gender perspective;³³ or should it be allowed to unfold and tell its own story first? The present research has adopted the last, narrative attitude, where “narrative” is defined along the lines of the “new perspectives on historical writing” developed since the late 1970s and especially in the 1980s and 1990s.³⁴ In contrast to the mere “antiquarian” reproduction of “what actually happened,” the “regenerated”³⁵ narrative focuses on the construction of a coherent story around a “pregnant principle,” with a

³³ It is because of the very novelty of the topic in Bulgarian historiography that the present research has opted for a methodologically broader approach and interpretation. Yet, it should be underlined that the gender perspective adopted in historical analysis has resulted in many of the most fruitful and enlightening discoveries in the field of welfare and population regulation in European history. Most of the cited secondary bibliographical items in English in this book (in particular, Gisela Bock and Pat Thane’s collection on gendered welfare approaches in early twentieth-century Europe, S. Pedersen’s monograph on the gender different nature of the British and French family allowance systems, as well as Lisa Pine’s research on Nazi population policy) bear useful comments on women’s public position and inequalities as enshrined in legislation by a corresponding state vision of “proper” gender roles. Other classic investigations in the frame of social policy and reproduction control written from a women’s history point of view are—to mention just a few—Kurt W. Back, *Family Planning and Population Control* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1989); Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Renate Bridenthal, Marion Kaplan, and Atina Grossman, *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

³⁴ The phrase has been borrowed from Peter Burke. Peter Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). In general, it denotes the rise of the “new”, social history in the late 1970s, embracing interdisciplinary areas of historical research, such as microhistory, the history of the body, history of events, history from below, the history of reading, oral history, the history of images, political history and overseas history, and more recently, environmental history.

³⁵ Peter Burke, “History of events and the revival of the narrative”, in Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, pp. 233–248. The term “regeneration” of the narrative was proposed by Peter Burke in 1991 to replace the less accurate term “revival” of the narrative. For further details, see Peter Burke, “History of events and the revival of the narrative”, in Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, p. 246.

theme, an argument and possible subplots of its own.³⁶ The “new” narrative does not comprise an uninterrupted chronological sequence of circumstances and events. Instead, it reduces the scale of research to a single topic of significance, around which subordinated layers of “thick description”³⁷ are built up to illustrate and examine the interplay between the subject of study and the culture within which it occurs.

Most importantly, the utilization of “regenerated history” facilitates the reconstruction, so far as this is possible, of the mental processes of the historical agents themselves. It recovers “the concepts they possessed, the distinctions they drew and the chains of reasoning they followed in their attempts to make sense of their world.”³⁸ Hence, it also illuminates and explains the decisions they took and the laws they made. The “regenerated” historical narrative helps the modern reader understand the style of reasoning which the historical actors followed—even if, in the words of the philosopher of science, Ian Hacking, their reasoning does not necessarily translate into one familiar to us.³⁹

In the context of the methodology adopted by the present work, the subject of population and social policy has been narrowed down to the narration and the examination of the path which the Bulgarian state assumed in its legislative activities toward children and the family, and which eventually led to the emergence of Bulgaria’s first pronatalist law in 1943–1944. The nucleus of interest is children, as representing the quality and quantity of the nation in general. Policies toward diverging cases of physically and mentally handicapped, socially deviant, or politically disadvantaged children, such as refugees, are left outside the scope of the present research.

The descriptive and chronologically organized documentary material falls into two parts. Part One examines the emergence and development of

³⁶ Lawrence Stone, “The revival of the narrative: Reflections on a new old history,” *Past and Present*, No. 85 (Nov. 1979), 3–24, p. 4.

³⁷ “Thick description” is a micro-scale approach to obscure cultures based on interpretive analysis. It was developed by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz and was best illustrated in his two articles “‘Thick description’: Towards an interpretive theory of culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) and “Blurred genres’: The refiguration of social thought,” *American Scholar* (1980), pp. 165–179. There Geertz argues that “culture is context,” i.e., it has to be grasped from a native’s point of view and that the researcher’s “formulation of other people’s symbol systems must be actor-oriented.”

³⁸ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), I, p. 47.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

the first state-generated child and maternity healthcare measures, legislation on childcare and family assistance. Part Two presents the culmination of the story, focusing on the legislative variants preceding the eventual Law for Large Bulgarian Families.

AGENTS OF RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A distinctive feature of the “new” narrative is a rekindled interest in the experience of the individual in history, ranging from the description of the micro-cosmos of the “ordinary” person to the life experience of a social and/or political elite. In the current work, the major agent of study is the state itself, as represented by its civil legislative and executive bodies, i.e., by its National Assembly (Parliament), the cabinets in power and the corresponding governmental sub-institutions. The institution of the monarchy, endowed by the 1879 Tŭrnovo Constitution with legislative, executive, and judiciary power alongside the Parliament and the government,⁴⁰ has been left out of consideration. Despite its undoubtedly important role in shaping legislation in the second half of the 1930s and in the early 1940s, no adequate sources could be identified as a basis to study it.

Where necessary and possible, the agents have been further individualized by introducing the politicians and public figures behind the corresponding institution, including their political, educational, and professional background, and occasionally, their social affiliation. As it was only recently that the names of a number of high-rank ministers and officials from the interwar period have been identified in Bulgarian historiography,⁴¹ a short record of their lives and, especially, of their education has been seen as useful to include in order to shed light on the possible origins of their legislative ideas. Recent studies on Bulgaria’s pre-Second World War ministers (in the entire period of 1878–1944) reveal that, due to the late emergence of the modern Bulgarian state and because of the youthfulness of Sofia University, most Bulgarian ministers were graduates of or had com-

⁴⁰ Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*, p. 52.

⁴¹ For further details, see Tasho Tashev’s introduction to his work, *Ministrite na Bŭlgaria, 1879–1999* [The ministers of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Marin Drinov,” 1999), and especially p. 19, where he provides the motives behind his reference book.

pleted specialized studies in universities in pre-1917 Russia, Romania, Austria–Hungary, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, etc.⁴² Ninety-two out of the two hundred and forty-seven ministers between 1878 and 1944 had studied law and had pursued a legal career before assuming their governmental positions.⁴³ These statistics raise the question as to what extent the agents of this narrative might have been influenced by their educational background in the choice and enforcement of a particular law, and how they reconciled diverse European legislative traditions with the local customs of Bulgaria to create an independent, Bulgarian law. The present work does not concentrate on the issue of legal transplants, which would require another study, nor again does it attempt to provide a comparison of Bulgaria’s population and family legislation with corresponding European laws, which would necessitate yet another comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, short biographic references to relevant politicians and public figures are included in the footnotes as an elementary (and inevitably incomplete) prosopography, in order to present a more informed outline of the narrative and to facilitate further research.

As the emphasis falls on the activities of the state and its representative agents, this monograph does not include a systematic survey of the operations of private activists and pre-1934 non-state organizations. Where the opinions of experts, public figures and some pressure groups, such as the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents,⁴⁴ are included within the narrative research, this reflects the peculiarities of Bulgaria’s political system (especially after 19 May 1934). Centralization of power and authoritarian practices in Bulgaria did not exclusively obliterate differences in public opinion but channeled “pluralistic” attitudes into the ideological framework proposed or approved by the state. Historians have already acknowledged that the viewpoints of intellectuals in the non-state sector often coincided

⁴² Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, p. 13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ So far, the Bulgarian term *mnogodetni* has been rendered into English in various ways. In his latest monograph, *Bulgaria* (2007), Prof. R. Crampton opted for the translation “large families,” whereas Dr Ch. Promitzer preferred the literal translation “with many children” (“Taking care of the national body,” 2007). My first (PhD, 2005) and final choice has been for “*mnogodetni*, child-rich parents,” employing the term jointly and/or interchangeably with “parents of numerous children” and “large families”—other close and descriptive terms. I hope that this combined translation will best convey the general idea of pronatalism applied to large families in Western historiography, while preserving its local, Bulgarian flavor, too.

with or explicitly supported officially launched state legislative initiatives.⁴⁵ The reasons behind this apparent compliance might be found either in the overlapping of private and state interests or, as in the case of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents studied here, in their desire to escape political or social outlawing. In this case, the independent legislative initiatives which the League promoted from outside the state eventually resulted in the state's intervention and the takeover of the League and its leadership.

INSTRUMENTS OF RESEARCH

The instruments which are the focus of our exploration of Bulgaria's state-generated population and family policy are laws, administrative directives, family allowances, and tax, cash, and land benefits designed to provide relief to families or to encourage pronatalist tendencies in their development. The major emphasis is on explicit policy outputs, i.e., on policies intentionally designed to achieve specific objectives regarding individuals in their family roles or the family unit as a whole.⁴⁶ Policy inputs, i.e., factors which might have influenced the policy-making process and the adoption of specific policies, are considered in terms voiced by the agents themselves and expressed in their motives, as presented to the attention of the Parliament in their debates in the National Assembly or in their presentations in the mass media. The validity of the "way they saw it" has been left unchallenged.

GENERAL LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As interesting as their evolution is, there is no space here to cover also the bills and debates surrounding the attempted changes in matrimony, divorce, and gender legislation, which touch implicitly rather than explicitly upon social policy toward population quality and numbers. Suffice to mention,

⁴⁵ Nikolai Poppetrov, "Opiti za dirizhirane na kulturata v Bŭlgariia (1934–1944)" [Attempts to channel culture in Bulgaria (1934–1944)], in Iskra Baeva (ed.), *Moderna Bŭlgariia: Sbornik Istoricheski Izsledvania v Chest na 65-godishninata na Profesor Dr Velichko Georgiev i Akademik Ilcho Dimitrov* [Modern Bulgaria: A collection of historical studies in honor of the sixty-fifth anniversary of Professor Dr Velichko Georgiev and Academician Ilcho Dimitrov] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv Kliment Ohridski," 1999), pp. 182–202, here p. 188.

⁴⁶ Anne Helene Gauthier, *The State and the Family: A Comparative Analysis of Family Policies in Industrialized Countries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 3–5.

however, that the introduction of civil marriage and divorce in the immediate post-1944 aftermath had its roots and origins in the 1920s–1930s and the early 1940s, respectively.

SOURCES

The body of primary sources for the study has been gathered from the National Library “Sv., Sv. Cyril and Methodius” in Sofia, from Sofia University Library, from the Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, as well as from the Central State Archives in Sofia. According to their nature, they fall into five categories:

Parliamentary minutes and parliamentary appendices

The parliamentary minutes and parliamentary appendices include the records of all parliamentary sessions and debates ever since the Bulgarian Parliament came into being in 1879, including bills and their preambles, as well as the text of the final laws. The minutes give a meticulous account of each word of dispute (or absence of such) in Parliament, which would lead to the acceptance or rejection of a law, provide the name and the political affiliation (until 1934) of the speaker, and, occasionally, give an insight into the personalities of the politicians and their private affairs.

According to the Tŭrnovo Constitution of 1878, Bulgaria was proclaimed a hereditary constitutional monarchy, where the legislative power was placed in the hands of an Ordinary and of a Grand, single-chambered, National Assembly. The Ordinary National Assembly (ONA) was to be elected for a three-year period by universal suffrage of males over the age of twenty-one, and all literate males over the age of thirty were eligible for election.⁴⁷ The primary responsibility of the deputies was to debate and approve legislative bills, to discuss and vote the state budget, state loans and taxes, and so on.⁴⁸ In contrast, the Grand National Assembly was to have twice as many elected deputies, including prominent members of the Bulgarian Orthodox State Church, the judiciary and local government. It was to be called to elect regents, to choose the head of state, and to sanction

⁴⁷ Richard Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 90.

⁴⁸ Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*, pp. 53–54.

changes in the state's boundaries or changes in the constitution.⁴⁹ It is the dealings of the Ordinary National Assembly which are of relevance in the present context and which have been taken into account in the research.

According to the Tŭrnovo Constitution, legislative power was held jointly by the monarch and by Parliament. In practice, this meant that in order to become law a bill had to be presented by the minister in charge as an order of the monarch to the attention of the National Assembly for approval. After being voted by the Parliament, the law had to be finally sanctioned by the monarch in order to appear in the *State Gazette* and thus to come into force. Whereas until 1934 a legislative bill was subjected to three hearings, when the National Assembly resumed its activities in 1938 votes were reduced to two parliamentary meetings. In cases of emergency, however, a bill could be put to the vote twice within the same parliamentary meeting.

Within periods perceived as endangering the internal and external security of the state, and when in practice there was no opportunity to summon the National Assembly, the Tŭrnovo Constitution delegated to the Council of Ministers (the supreme executive state body alongside the monarch) the right to pass decrees with the status of laws, i.e., so-called decree-laws.⁵⁰ Their final codification, however, had to be sanctioned by the first National Assembly to follow. As the National Assembly was dissolved after the military coup on 19 May 1934 and was reopened only four years later, the constitutional provisions were exploited both by the organizers of the military coup and by several succeeding governments.⁵¹

Archival units

The Tŭrnovo Constitution envisaged the formation of six ministries: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cults, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of People's Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of War. The formation of any new ministry required a complicated intrusion into and change of the constitution. This, for its part, was considered as much a legal as well as an unwanted political affair, and by 1944, in all

⁴⁹ Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, p. 90; Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*, pp. 54–55; Aleksandŭr Girginov, *Dŭrzhavno Ustroistvo na Bŭlgariia* [State constitution of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Izdanie na "Bŭlgarski pečat," 1921), pp. 155–167.

⁵⁰ *Naredba-zakon*.

only two changes of the Tŭrnovo Constitution had been undertaken, in 1893 and in 1911, in order to accommodate the creation of four additional ministries (the Ministry of Trade and Agriculture, the Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads, and Communications in 1893; and their further transformations into a Ministry of Trade, a Ministry of Agriculture, a Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads, and Public Affairs, and a Ministry of Railways, Post Offices, and Telegraphs in 1911).⁵² Despite the voiced need for an independent ministry of labor and a ministry of people's health, these were never formed before the communist takeover on 9 September 1944. Yet the change of the Tŭrnovo Constitution on 11 July 1911 added a Directorate of People's Health⁵³ under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior, the latter being renamed the Ministry of the Interior and of People's Health.⁵⁴ The minister of the interior became the Directorate's official representative and spokesman in the National Assembly and in public, thereby rendering the chiefs and experts of the Directorate publicly invisible.⁵⁵

This study makes extensive use of sources available in Bulgaria's Central State Archives in Sofia, and, in particular, draws upon the archival holdings of the Directorate of People's Health (*Fond* [F.] 372), of the Ministry of the Interior and People's Health (F. 264), and of the Ministry of Justice (F. 242). Their documentary information provides an insight into the data collected by experts and politicians alike, in order to prepare and justify certain bills.

The files of the Ministry of the Interior and People's Health are a good, although very scattered source which contributes to the reconstruction of

⁵¹ Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*, p. 55.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵³ It is conventional in Western historiography of Bulgaria to translate *narodno zdrave* as "public health." Yet, "public" does not render the complex linguistic connotation of the Bulgarian adjective *narodno*, denoting "for the people," "of the people," and "by the people," which was exploited by the communist regime for ideological purposes (for instance, *Narodna Republika Bŭlgariia*, i.e., People's Republic of Bulgaria, meaning a republic created by the people, belonging to the people and working for the welfare of the people). The English translation "public health" does not convey the meaning of continuity of structures and institutions between the pre-1944 and the post-1944 period, either (see "Ministerstvo na vŭtreshnite raboti i narodnoto zdrave," i.e., "Ministry of the Interior and People's Health" in the pre-1944 period versus "Ministerstvo na narodnoto zdrave," i.e., Ministry of People's Health' in the post-1944 era). As I found the language of the 1918–1944 period particularly rich in terms and expressions otherwise claimed to be exclusively "socialist," I have opted for translations as close as possible to the original source.

⁵⁴ *Ministerstvo na vŭtreshnite raboti i narodnoto zdrave*.

⁵⁵ See footnote 3 in Appendix 8 in Tashev, p. 570, as well as the introductory notes to F. 372 of the Directorate of People's Health in the Central State Archives in Sofia.

the original ideas of governmental authorities in terms of welfare policies and ideological motivation. Occasionally, comments on some bills shed light on the bonding and coordination among the ministries before a legislative proposal was presented to the attention of the National Assembly. As indicated earlier, a consensus in the Council of Ministers, i.e., a synchronization of attitudes and opinions among all ministers, was required before any formal act of governmental legislative initiative could enter the Parliament.

Further utilizations are made of the archival units of the General Directorate of People's Health, which provides additional information on various administrative or organizational investigations undertaken to prepare and facilitate the drafting of a particular law. This includes data related to public health inspections, conferences, or doctors' reports on social disease, and statistics on child mortality.

Since Radio "Sofia" was not simply Bulgaria's first radio-station, but also became the state's official instrument of propaganda in 1934, some of its archival material (F. 178) was integrated in the present study. This offers an interesting perspective on the motivation and justification of pronatalist policies launched by the state in the late 1930s.

All the surviving material that could be found relating to the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents (F. 278) has been taken into consideration, too.

Mass media: Newspapers and magazines

In order to follow the implementation of legislative acts and also "thicken" the description, some magazines and newspapers officially approved and recommended by state authorities were surveyed in the course of the research. First comes *Dürzhaven Vestnik* [State gazette], the official Bulgarian government publication, which printed each piece of legislation accepted by the National Assembly.

The dissolution of the Parliament after the military coup in May 1934 shifted the focus for present purposes from parliamentary procedures and debates to the (then created) journal, *Obshtestveno Podpomagane* [Public assistance], the official publication of the Ministry of the Interior and People's Health, started in 1935, interrupted in 1937 (allegedly, for financial reasons), and reappearing in 1938. The journal was created in response to the enactment of the Law for Public Assistance in 1934. It contains articles

about the Law's acceptance and public implementation, as well as keeping track of its later amendments.

The publications *Mediko–Pedagogichesko Spisanie* [Medico-pedagogical journal], whose editorial board held high-rank social (and occasionally political) positions, *Nasheto Dete* [Our child], the journal of the Bulgarian Union for Child Protection (placed under direct state-control after 1934), and *Narodno Zdrave* [People's health], the journal of the Association for People's Health, some of whose issues were included in the archival collection of the Directorate of People's Health, have also provided material to enlarge the narrative. Their interest was exclusively focused on children's health, i.e. on issues of eugenics and fertility, child illnesses, child and maternal mortality, as well advice on childcare. Occasionally they would refer to relevant articles published by other journals, such as the *Demokraticheski Pregled* [Democratic review], the journal of the Democratic Party, and *Izvestiia na Bŭlgarskoto Druzhestvo za Sotsialen Napredŭk* [Information bulletin of the Bulgarian Association for Social Progress].

Since a number of Bulgarian ministers had a professional background in law, *Advokatski Pregled* [Solicitors' review], the official newspaper of the Association of Bulgarian Solicitors, as well as major legal journals such as *Iuriditcheski Arkhiv* [Juridical archive], *Iuridicheska Misŭl* [Juridical thought], *Iuridicheski Pregled* [Juridical review], *Pravna Misŭl* [Legal thought], and *Spisanie na Iuridicheskoto Druzhestvo* [Journal of the Association of Jurists] were surveyed in hope of gaining more detailed information on legal practice and disputes. They also provided an insight into the evolution (regarding the continuity and change) of certain legal debates and laws. As many Bulgarian lawyers were graduates of German universities, the available copies of *Zeitschrift für Osteuropäisches Recht* [Journal of East European law] housed in the National Library in Sofia, were also inspected. *Zhenski Glas* [Women's voice], the newspaper of the Bulgarian Women's Union, provided some additional information on contemporary legal perspectives. The Union's leader, Mrs Dimitrana Ivanova, a graduate of law, was widely read in national and international legal issues concerning women, children and the family.

The newspaper *Mnogodetnik* [Child-rich parent], the original publication of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents, proved an excellent source for the background of certain legislative initiatives, by elucidating

the driving forces and mechanisms behind the Law for Large Families in Bulgaria.

Articles from popular and publicly influential newspapers such as *Mir* [World], *Dnes* [Today], *Prosveta* [Enlightenment], *Utro* [Morning], and *Zaria* [Dawn], but also from less well-known newspapers such as *Pokhod* [On the march], have been consulted when their authors were distinguished politicians, statesmen, or public figures, and especially when they were referred to in parliamentary debates.

Independent publications

Last but not least come publications of speeches, impressions, and memoirs of pre-1944 Bulgarian politicians and state officials. Some of them fall into the lists of officially outlawed and destroyed literature in the period after 9 September 1944, where a single copy was deposited in the National Library and in the Library of Sofia University. They offer valuable information about the socio-economic and demographic situation of the country and about the political orientation which framed the ways social policies were shaped in the 1920s–1930s. In addition, they give helpful insight in the private life but also the ideological mindset of a whole range of politicians.

3. A historical outline of the period under investigation

THE PATH TO NEUILLY (1919)

Social and population policy is not an isolated political venture, but serves the perceived historical requirements of its day. A trademark of the period of investigation was Bulgaria's shattered expectations to achieve the much-desired national regeneration after nearly five hundred years under Ottoman rule.

The young country's "difficult beginnings"⁵⁶ (also referred to as "ordeals of a nation")⁵⁷ went back to November 1878, when as a result of external rather than internal forces, and intricate political games after Russia's vic-

⁵⁶ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans, 1804–1945* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), p. 137.

⁵⁷ Pashenko Dimitroff, *Boris III of Bulgaria: Toiler, Citizen, King, 1894–1943* (Sussex: The Book Guild Ltd. Lewes, 1986), p. 49.

tory in the Russian–Ottoman War of 1877–1878, the new Bulgarian nation-state reappeared on the map of Europe. The 3 March 1878 Preliminaries of Peace between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in San Stefano had envisaged a vast Bulgarian state, which in territorial terms would have satisfied any national dream and sentiment. It was foreseen to extend from the Danube in the north to the Rhodope Mountains in the south, and from the Black Sea in the east to the Morava and Vardar Valleys in the west, including some of the Aegean Coast and the inland cities of Skopje, Ohrid, Bitolia, and Seres. Yet, the final Peace Treaty of Berlin in July 1878 accorded with competing British and Austro-Hungarian demands instead.⁵⁸ San Stefano Bulgaria was dismembered into four, with southern Bulgaria forming a new autonomous unit of the Ottoman Empire (Eastern Rumelia), Macedonia being returned to Ottoman rule, and the Morava Valley and the strategic towns of Pirot and Vrania being handed over to Serbia. The Principality of Bulgaria, with a Christian prince to be elected by the Bulgarians and confirmed by the Great Powers, was reduced to 37.5 per cent of the size of the San Stefano variant, confined to a relatively small area between the Balkan mountains and the Danube River.

In practice, the Berlin Treaty “equipped” the new Bulgarian state “with a ready-made programme for territorial expansion and a burning sense of the injustice meted out to it by the Great Powers.”⁵⁹ In the eyes of her politicians, Bulgaria had been reduced to an “exchange-coin” in the hands of the international authorities, exactly like any other small Balkan state.⁶⁰ Thus from the very start, the explicit prime target of Bulgaria’s foreign relations was fixed on the liberation of Macedonia and other territories regarded as ethnically Bulgarian and on the ethnic unifications of all Bulgarians within the boundaries of a nation-state.⁶¹ The national unification and liberation policy led to a coup and four wars in the three decades to follow, including two Balkan wars with Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, and Romania between 1912–1913, not to mention the First World War, in which Bulgaria entered

⁵⁸ The following account of Bulgaria’s history between 1878 and 1944 is based on Crampton’s *Concise History of Bulgaria*. Where other sources were used, they are duly indicated.

⁵⁹ Crampton, *A Concise History*, pp. 85–86; Robert J. McIntyre, *Bulgaria: Politics, Economics and Society* (London—New York: Printer Publishers, 1988), pp. 18–19; R. Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, I, pp. 181–192.

⁶⁰ Alexandŭr Tsankov, *Bŭlgariia v Burno Vreme. Spomeni* [Bulgaria in stormy times. Memoirs] (Sofia: Prozorets, 1998), p. 283, in Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, I, p. 183.

⁶¹ Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, I, pp. 183–184.

on the side of the Central Powers in 1915.⁶² These brought Bulgaria territorial disappointments and became, as was recognized by all Bulgarian political parties, a political and socio-economic disaster.

The defeat in September 1918 and the subsequent Neuilly Peace Treaty in November 1919 cast the country into the category of the “losers.”⁶³ The political and fiscal settlements of the Neuilly Treaty pierced the heart of the economically ruined and nationally severed Bulgarian society and continued to haunt the country’s political and cultural life throughout the next decades. From a territorial point of view, Bulgaria was deprived of a total of 90,000 square kilometers⁶⁴ of her strategic territories (Macedonia, South-

⁶² An interesting summary of Bulgaria’s territorial, economic, and political claims during the First World War was provided in the speech of Colonel Sir Thomas Holdich, President of the Geographical Society, in November 1917, a year before the catastrophic outcome of the war. Acknowledging that inevitably “political and geographic interests should often clash in the settlement of Balkan territories,” Holdich, nevertheless, referred to Bulgaria as “suffering under the sense of wrongs.” According to his concluding comments, “Bulgaria has always maintained that the province of Adrianople, and the Dobrudja with the command of the Danube exits to the Black Sea, were stolen from her as the penalty of exhaustion and weakness after her defeat by Serbia and Greece combined. She will be little inclined to surrender territory to Serbia. Therein lies one thorny geographical problem to be grasped, and the solution of it depends on after-war conditions.” For further details, see Colonel Sir Thomas Holdich, “Geographical war problems in the Near East,” read at the meeting of the Society, 12 November 1917, *The Geographical Journal*, No. 51 (January 1918), 3–13, pp. 7–8, 12. See also Leland Buxton’s comment on the 1918 peace treaty and his prediction of Bulgaria’s future: “It is to be feared that Bulgaria—unless the present settlement is revised, or the League of Nations effectively protects the Bulgarian populations in Macedonia, Thrace, and the Dobrudja—will continue to be a source of unrest.” For further details, see Leland Buxton, *The Black Sheep of the Balkans* (London: Nisbet, 1920), p. xii.

For the most recent study on the consequences of the Berlin Treaty in Bulgaria’s history, see Richard Cramp-ton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 116–123, 150–152, 157–174, esp. 190–220.

⁶³ The terms “winners” and “losers” are used, rightly in my opinion, both by Stevan Pavlowitch and D. Hupchick in their histories of the Balkans in 1999 and in 2002. Hupchick, in particular, provides a clearly emotionally colored, yet well-grounded description of the Versailles settlements in 1919–1920, and the ideological inapplicability of Wilson’s “nation” model to the history of Eastern Europe in terms of national self-determination and plebiscite. In addition, the pages dedicated to the Versailles settlement might also serve as an interesting historical insight into the more recent Balkan conflicts in the 1990s.

For further details see Chapter X: “The First World War and the Paris Peace Settlement 1914–1920,” in Pavlowich, *A History of the Balkans*, pp. 208–229; Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans from Constantinople to Communism* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 329–352.

⁶⁴ The following review of the Neuilly Peace Treaty is based on R. Crampton’s account in *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, p. 148; and in *Bulgaria* (2007), pp. 221–222. For other recent accounts in German, see Hans-Joachim Härtel and Roland Schönfeld, *Bulgarien. Vom Mittelalter bis zum Gegenwart* [Bulgaria: From the Middle Ages to the present] (Munich: Verlag Friedrich Pustet Regensburg, Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 1998), pp. 180–181. For recent accounts in Bulgarian, see Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, I, pp. 140–144; Elena Statelova and Stoicho Grüncharov, *Istoriia na Nova Bŭlgariia 1879–1944* [A history of modern Bulgaria 1879–1944] (Sofia: Anubis, 1999), pp. 336–338; G.P. Genov, *Nioiskiat Dogovor i Bŭlgariia* [The Neuilly Peace Treaty and Bulgaria] (Sofia, 2000). The settlements of the Neuilly Peace Treaty can be found in A.H.R. [sic], “The new boundaries of Bulgaria,” *The Geographical Journal*, No. 2 (Feb. 1920), pp. 127–138. An excellent comparison of maps of Bulgaria’s changing territories during the period 1878–1919 is provided in “The New boundaries of Bulgaria,” *Geographical Review*, No. 4 (April–June 1920), pp. 299–305, 301.

ern Dobrudzha, a large part of Western Bulgaria and a tract of territory in the southwest). This dramatically restricted her wheat output and cut her off from her access to the Aegean Coast (part of these territories—Macedonia and the south of Dobrudzha—were recovered in 1940 in return for Bulgaria's joining the Tripartite Pact in March 1941).⁶⁵ Reparations to Greece, Yugoslavia, and Romania, as well as to the Allies were set both in kind and in cash, and the preposterous sum of 2,250 million gold francs required to be paid over a period of thirty-seven years. The country was denied an air force and the Bulgarian army was reduced to 20,000 volunteers. Worst, about one million people (sixteen per cent of Bulgaria's pre-1918 population), the majority of them being ethnic Bulgarians, were left outside the boundaries of the state.

According to Bulgarian politicians of the period and to contemporary Bulgarian historians, the wars put an end to the normal, modernizing development of the country's agriculture and its local industry, "however limited," and plunged Bulgaria into an economic, financial and social crisis which exhausted "to the utmost limits the forces of the Bulgarian people."⁶⁶ The loss of manpower between the ages of twenty to fifty during the three subsequent wars was estimated at nearly thirty-three per cent of the male population. The welfare of over 200,000 maimed soldiers and of 150,000 families of war casualties, as well as the plight of 400,000 Bulgarian refugees from the territories surrendered to Greece and Serbia,⁶⁷ became part of the political agenda of a succession of Bulgarian governments. In 1925,

⁶⁵ See Winston Churchill's observation in 1944, cited by the American economic historian John Lampe: "Three times in my life has this wretched Bulgaria subjected a peasant population to all the pangs of war and chastisement of defeat!" As Lampe noted, however, "few Western observers, Churchill included, have bothered to look carefully into these misfortunes, let alone to search for positive accomplishment." For further details, see John R. Lampe, *The Bulgarian Economy in the Twentieth Century* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 13.

⁶⁶ The following account is based on Iliia Ianulov's monograph *Economic Bulgaria and the Reparations* (Sofia: Royal Printing Office, 1929), published in English. For a most recent detailed account on the social and economic consequences of Bulgaria's war losses, see Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, I, pp. 141–144. Other references will be duly indicated.

⁶⁷ In 1925, A.A. Pallis described the population movements, either voluntary or forced, in the Balkans immediately before and after the First World War as having had "the effect of profoundly modifying the racial geography of the regions in question" and having led to "a complete reshuffling of races in Macedonia, Thrace and Anatolia. Where before there was great diversity, there is now nearly complete homogeneity. Political problems, which owed their complication to the mixture of mutually antipathic races, have been simplified." A.A. Pallis, "Racial migrations in the Balkans during the years 1912–1924," *The Geographical Journal*, No. 4 (Oct. 1925), pp. 315–331, 316. The following decade, however, would disprove Pallis's naive conclusions.

Bulgaria appealed for help to the International Bureau for Labor Protection to arrange a Refugee Loan. Three years later, a sequence of bad harvests, which cost the state half of its resources in gold francs to secure grain from the United States, and a devastating earthquake, which brought destruction to one sixth of the country, topped the economic misery.⁶⁸ Bulgaria was forced to appeal to the League of Nations for a yet another loan.⁶⁹

After persistent negotiations, in 1923 the enormous sum of reparations was reduced to 550 million gold francs to be paid over sixty years with an interest of five per cent, and in 1932 it was scrapped altogether.⁷⁰ Yet in 1919, Bulgaria had been the first among all participants in the First World War to start paying back her pre-war loans.⁷¹ Whereas up to 1926 payment had been in French francs, after 11 December 1926 the country was compelled to continue the payments in increasing percentages of gold centimes. This difference alone imposed an additional burden of over seven billion levs. The total amount of reparation debts and the added pre-war debts represented about thirty per cent of the total national wealth of the country, and was recognized as three to four times larger than that imposed on the other defeated nations. According to contemporaries, by 1932 the state budget, one third of which was swallowed by debts, reparations and additional expenditures for the professional army system, had already drained the country's vital resources. The predominantly agricultural population of Bulgaria was cast into such a state that the financial committee of the League of Nations itself had to interfere and establish that the state budget for 1929/30 "cannot—and therefore ought not—exceed the amount of 7 billion levs." Total impoverishment and misery turned into a standard feature of daily existence. The modernization of social and economic life, and of agriculture, in particular, was the perceived remedy. But then the question arose, where were the necessary financial means to be found?

⁶⁸ Dimităr Sazdov, Milcho Lalkov, R. Popov, and Vl. Migeu (eds.), *Istoriia na Bŭlgariia, 681–1960* [A history of Bulgaria, 681–1960], 2 vols. (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Arges," 1995), II, pp. 331–332.

⁶⁹ Ianulov, *Ilia, Economic Bulgaria and the Reparations* (Sofia: Royal Printing Office), 1929, p. 2.

⁷⁰ A copy of the 1923 reparations agreement in Bulgarian can be found in B.D. Kesiakov, *Prinos kŭm Diplomaticheskata Istoriia na Bŭlgariia, 1878–1925: Dogovori, Konventsii, Spogodbi, Protokoli i Drugi Sŭglasheniia i Diplomatcheski Aktove s Kratki Obiasnitelni Belezhki* [A contribution to the diplomatic history of Bulgaria, 1878–1925: Treaties, conventions, agreements, and other diplomatic acts, with brief explanatory comments] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa "Rodopi," 1925), pp. 216–220.

⁷¹ The following account is based on Professor Ilia Ianulov's monograph *Economic Bulgaria and the reparations*, published in English.

IDEOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS OF THE ERA

The period between 1918–1944 stands out in Bulgaria’s modern, post-1878 history as one of the most tormented ones in political, economic, and everyday life experience. Regarding its interpretation in pre-1989 Bulgarian historiography, the interwar years were also the most liable to gross ideological misinterpretations.⁷² In its initial, post-1944 classification this period was supposedly associated with “monarcho-fascism” in general, i.e., the joint rule of a monarch with a succession of fascist governments (since June 1923), or more “subtly” classified into three sub-periods: “fascist” (from 9 June 1923 to 19 May 1934), “military-fascist” (from 19 May 1934 to 22 January 1935) and “monarcho-capitalist” from 22 January 1935 onward.⁷³ Unease about the summary judgement of the character of Bulgaria’s pre-1944 history as simply “fascist,” however, started in the 1970s, when Bulgarian historians acknowledged elements of “traditional bourgeois democracy,” along with a “fascist” or a “pro-fascist” trend in the structures of the Democratic Alliance in the period of 1923–1925. In the late 1980s, Bulgarian historiography preferred to acknowledge “more conservative” and “reactionary” tendencies in Bulgarian political life of the mid-1920s, which would later be regarded as having developed similarities to the fascist ideology of a strong power within a strong state, yet which would not have advocated the idea of the nation as the supreme goal.⁷⁴ Yet, if the 1920s were increasingly viewed as from a “fascist” political “base,” the mid-1930s would still be associated with “fascism and its manifestations” in Bulgaria.⁷⁵

⁷² For an analysis of the problems of modern Bulgarian historiography, see Daniela Koleva and Ivan Elenkov, “Did ‘the change’ happen? Post-socialist historiography in Bulgaria,” in Ulf Brunnbauer (ed.), *(Re)Writing History: Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism* (Münster, 2004), pp. 94–127, as well as Koleva and Elenkov’s more detailed version in Bulgarian, “Promenite v bŭgarskata istoricheska nauka sled 1989: ocher-taniia i granitsi” [Post-1989 changes in Bulgarian historical science: Lines and boundaries], in Diana Mishkova (ed.), *Balkanskiat XIX vek. Drugi Prochiti* [The Balkan nineteenth century: Other readings] (Sofia: Riva, 2006), pp. 28–81.

⁷³ N. Nedev, in Vladimir Migeve, “Politicheskata sistema na Bŭlgariia ot 9 iuni 1923 do 9 septemvri 1944” [Bulgaria’s political system, 9 June 1923 to 9 September 1944], *Istoricheski Pregled* [Historical review], No. 9 (1990), pp. 77–79.

⁷⁴ Rumiana Pŭrvanova, “Programata na Demokraticheskia Sgovor” [The program of the Democratic Alliance], *Historical Review*, No. 6 (1987), pp. 26–38, here p. 37.

⁷⁵ See Rositsa Stoinanova’s analysis of the rule of the Democratic Party from 1931 to 1934, conceptualized within the framework of a traditional bourgeois parliamentary ideology which would reject the “appearance of the new political forces as exemplified by fascism” and would express fear about the “possibility to witness the

While this categorization was not accepted by Western historians,⁷⁶ it was only after the political changes in 1989 that the label “fascism” was openly challenged by Bulgarian scholars and instead, the term “authoritarian regimes” was adopted to denote the country’s increasing political centralization in the mid-1920s and, especially, from the mid-1930s.⁷⁷ Currently, a consensus has been reached between Bulgarian and international experts who have recognized that Bulgaria’s agrarian social structure as well as her monarchic rule were the major barriers towards the infiltration of fascist practices and the establishment of fascism in the country.⁷⁸ Interestingly, this recognition re-echoes the assessment of Bulgaria’s socio-political structure provided by D. Mishev, a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Science, as early as 1919. The latter equated the Bulgarian peasantry with Bulgaria’s rural democracy and acknowledged that “it was this peasant democracy who [*sic*] in the nineteenth century created the pillars upon which was built the State of Bulgaria in the Balkans.”⁷⁹ Despite the military coup of 19 May 1934, it is acknowledged that Bulgaria’s political system preserved a relative pluralism in its leading (governmental) sector up to the very eve of the communist takeover. Characterized by relative rather than absolute restrictions (as would become the case after 1944), by limited opportunities on the part of a nevertheless-existing opposition, and by flexible maneuvering of the ruling center amongst the various opposi-

establishment of an open fascist-type of dictatorship” in Bulgaria. For further details, see Rositsa Stoianova, “Obshtestveno-politicheski vüzgledi na Demokraticeskata partiia” [Socio-political views of the Democratic Party], *Historical Review*, No. 11 (1989), pp. 37–53, here p. 52.

⁷⁶ Hans-Joachim, Hoppe, *Bulgarien—Hitlers eigenwilliger Verbündeter: eine Fallstudie zur nationalsozialistischen Südosteuropapolitik* [Bulgaria—Hitler’s self-willed ally: A case study of national socialist policies in Southeastern Europe] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979); Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*.

⁷⁷ On Bulgaria’s political system see Vladimir Migeu, “Bulgariia mezhdú demokratiata i avtoritarizma” [Bulgaria between democracy and authoritarianism], in Dimităr Sazdov, Milcho Lalkov, R. Popov and Vl. Migeu (eds.), *A History of Bulgaria, 681–1960*, vol. II, pp. 390–391; Plamen Tsvetkov and Nikolai Poppetrov, “Kúm tipologiya na politicheskoto razvitie na Búlgariia prez 30-te godini” [Towards a categorization of the political development of Bulgaria in the 1930s], *Historical Review*, No. 2 (1990), pp. 63–78; Stelova and Grüncharov, *A History of Modern Bulgaria*; Poppetrov, “Attempts to channel culture in Bulgaria,” pp. 182–202.

⁷⁸ The absence of a fascist regime in Bulgaria does not preclude the presence of a number of shorter- or longer-lived fascist organizations in the interwar period, with either Italian or German orientation, but with no active communication and collaboration among themselves, and with dubious impact on Bulgaria’s social life as a whole. For a concise review of the history of fascist organizations and fascist propaganda in Bulgaria, see Nikolai Poppetrov, *Fashizmut v Búlgariia* [Fascism in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Kama, 2008); Gergana Velichkova, *Propaganda na Fashizma v Búlgariia, 1922–1934* [Propaganda of fascism in Bulgaria, 1922–1934] (Sofia: Tilia Publishing House, 2002).

⁷⁹ For further details, see D. Mishev, *The Bulgarians in the Past (Pages from the Bulgarian Cultural History)* (Rue Caroline: Lausanne Librairie Centrale des Nationalités, 1919), pp. 463–464.

tional circles, the authoritarian style of Bulgaria's political life would remain "unaltered during the whole period until 9 September 1944."⁸⁰ If "certain modifications" of the system occurred in the early 1940s, they are to be interpreted in the light of the necessities of war and the obligations of the alliance with the Third Reich. The Civilian Mobilization Law of May 1940, in particular, is acknowledged as "a first breath of change" in the direction of the "hardening" of the cultural-political life of Bulgaria.⁸¹ Although the period between 1919 and June 1923, i.e., of the rule of the leftist Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, was subjected to various political assessments by socialist historiography, it would nevertheless be justified to analyze it in the framework of authoritarianism, too, as far as some of its political practices rather than its political ideology are concerned.⁸²

Bulgaria's turbulent post-First World War history commenced with a state tribunal over ex-ministers found guilty of involving Bulgaria in the First World War and the eventual national catastrophe. This legal and judicial act had been preceded by the enforced abdication of King Ferdinand on 3 October 1918 in favor of his son, Boris III. Further on, the period incorporates two military coups (9 June 1923 and 16 May 1934), and an armed communist-led uprising (September 1923) drowned in blood and followed by a Law for the Defense of the State passed in 1923. The latter promulgated the death penalty for every act of political resistance and was further amended in 1924, 1925, and 1942, taking repression to extremes. Left-wing political organizations and their adherents became its main target of attack. Martial law was declared on 16 April 1925 after the communist bombing of Sveta Nedelia Cathedral in Sofia, and an estimated 6,000 people were detained and executed immediately after. In May 1934, all political parties and their supporting political organizations were banned for a ten-year period.

⁸⁰ Tsvetkov and Poppetrov, "Towards a categorization of the political development," pp. 76–77; Poppetrov, "Attempts to channel culture," pp. 187–188.

⁸¹ Poppetrov, "Attempts to channel culture," p. 188. Poppetrov's study addresses the cultural changes in Bulgaria between 1934 and 1944. Along with the Civilian Mobilization Law of May 1940, he points out the establishment of the Bulgarian youth organization *Brannik* [Defender] as well as the Bulgarian–German–Italian Agreements for Cultural Cooperation of June and November 1940 as other indicators of a "hardening" of state policies towards culture in Bulgaria.

⁸² See St. Grūncharov's comments on the BANU's methods of exerting political power in *A History of Modern Bulgaria*, pp. 365, 369, 375; Crampton, *A Concise History*, pp. 149–151; Härtel et al., *Bulgaria*, p. 182.

In May 1934, the National Assembly, the major legislative institution of the country, was dissolved for three years; it was brought back to political life in 1938, but via manipulated elections. From the 1940s and especially after 1943, a partisan (communist and pro-Soviet) guerrilla movement was orchestrated, and sabotage became frequent as a result of Bulgaria's involvement in the Second World War on the side of Germany. It was then that the Fatherland Front, a 1942 resistance, antiwar, anti-royal, pro-civil liberties political organization composed of four diverse political parties—Communists, Social Democrats, left-wing Agrarians, and *Zvenari* (the latter being avowedly elitist and etatist in their ideology, both authoritarian and republican-minded, and instigators of the 16 May coup in 1934)—became active underground.

The outbursts of political turmoil in the interwar period were followed by social instability (the late 1930s excepted), and the country seemed to oscillate “between democracy and dictatorship.”⁸³ The “spirit” of the time is expressively conveyed through the cataclysmic terminology applied by post-1989 Bulgarian historians to the years between 1918 and 1944. “Rout and despair” and “an orange start”⁸⁴ marks the period of the rule of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU) from 1919 to its overthrow on 9 June 1923, “the frenzy of political extremes” the rule of Aleksandŭr Tsankov’s Democratic Alliance (June 1923–1925), while a “difficult normalization” summarizes the essence of Liapchev’s liberal cabinet (1926–1931). “Demoralization: ‘partisan debauchery’ and ‘state parasitism’” are the peculiarities of the People’s Bloc rule (1931–1934); “authoritarian experiments” and “the military in power” characterize the 19 May coup regimes (1934–1935), and “blood-drenched times” relate the atmosphere of the period from March 1941 to 1944. In contrast, the descriptive rhetoric of the second half of the 1930s, i.e., the so-called “royal rule” (1935–1941), is represented by relative stability, even serenity: “a strong political year,” and “economic, social and military policies in the pre-war years.”

A succession of twenty-two governments and thirteen premiers followed in the relatively short historical time of twenty-five years between the two world wars. In terms of ideology, they ranged between leftist (the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1919–1923) and right-wing (the Dem-

⁸³ Härtel et al., *Bulgaria*, p. 179.

⁸⁴ As the banner of the BANU was orange, its color became synonymous with the BANU’s rule.

ocratic Alliance under Aleksandŭr Tsankov, 1923–1925, the 19 May 1934 *coup d'état* government of Kimon Georgiev) to moderate (the Democratic Alliance under Andrei Liapchev, 1926–1931, the People's Bloc, 1931–1934, Georgi Kioseivanov's three cabinets between 1935 and 1939). Bogdan Filov's pro-German cabinets in the early 1940s and especially their ideological platform remain relatively unexplored.⁸⁵

Yet, whereas violence and conflicting interests seem to have been a trademark of Bulgaria's political powers, a distinctive difference in the ideological principles of the various parties was lacking in the view of post-1989 Bulgarian historians.⁸⁶ Ideological continuity, rather than disruption, underscored the practice of the cabinets in power. Its roots dated back to the pre-war period, when ever since the 1880s national rather than economic interests had been the determinants of Bulgaria's politics. In the words of historians Richard Crampton and Marin Pundeff, Bulgaria's post-Liberation bourgeoisie had been fashioned in the image of the state and not vice versa.⁸⁷ Anguish over national wrongs permeated both the political and public sector, emotionally bonding those in power and in opposition with the civil sector—the intelligentsia and voluntary organizations of various colors (including the traditionally “insubordinate” Bulgarian Women's Union)—in a “home-grown” and “right-wing” project for national unification.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Grüncharov's only comment on the succession of Filov's cabinets relates the latter to the King's long-term efforts to “secure a full subjection of the executive power from a personal standpoint, too.” See Statelova and Grüncharov, *A History of Modern Bulgaria*, p. 585.

⁸⁶ Statelova and Grüncharov, *A History of Modern Bulgaria*, p. 377.

⁸⁷ Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918*, pp. 513–514; Marin Pundeff, “The University of Sofia at eighty,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Sep. 1968), pp. 438–446, here p. 440.

Pundeff, in particular, describes the foundation of Bulgaria's first university as having being ideologically inspired by “the tradition of enlightened nationalism from the period of the national revival.” The principal justification for establishing Sofia University was, in the words of the Minister of Education Shishmanov, “to produce ‘a more homogeneous intelligentsia educated within the country’ and imbued with a spirit of patriotism and nationalism which the foreign universities could not give Bulgarian students.” Modeled after the University of Berlin, whose origins and functions Shishmanov was said to admire, a Bulgarian university served “to muster the intellectual resources of the nation, help the cause of its unification, and provide antidotes to the ideas of cosmopolitanism and internationalism of the time.”

⁸⁸ Ivan Elenkov, “Voinite i tsennostnite transformatsii v bŭlgarskata kultura” [The wars and the value transformations in Bulgarian culture], in *Rodno i Diasno. Prinos kŭm Istoriata na Nesbŭdnatiia “Desen Proekt” v Bŭlgariia mezhdŭ Dvete Svetovni Voini* [Native and right-wing: A contribution to the history of the unrealized “rightist project” in interwar Bulgaria] (Sofia: LIK, 1998), pp. 31–44, here p. 31–32; Raina Gavrilova, “Grazhdanskiat sektor 1878–1944” [The civil sector 1878–1944], in Raina Gavrilova and Ivan Elenkov, *Kŭm Istoriata na Grazhdanskiia Sektor v Bŭlgariia* [Contribution to the history of the civil sector in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Izsledvane na Grazhdanskiia Sektor, No. 2, 1992), p. 42; Virzhiniia Paskaleva, *Bŭlgarkata prez Vŭzrazhdaneto* [The Bulgarian woman in the National Revival Period], 2nd ed. (Sofia: 1984) and Margarita Cholakova, *Bŭlgarskoto Zhensko*

The country's increasing political centralization since the early 1920s and especially, since the mid-1930s⁸⁹ was marked by the rise of "cushioned" authoritarianism. While elements of extremely right ideological tendency were not entirely missing in the country's political life, Bulgaria's agrarian social structure, coupled to monarchic rule, was the major barrier towards the establishment of fascism.

Since the start of the First World War, social and economic state control became a distinct goal for Bulgaria's political elites. Within the context of a heightened sense of wronged nationalism, state policies, especially in the field of industry and commerce, were predominantly determined by the strategic goals of the state, and state protectionism of the economic sector increasingly expanded over the next decades.⁹⁰ The pre-war relative liberalism was seen (mostly) as outdated, and a more rigorous type of state intervention (regulation, planning, state participation) in the country's economic and social life was advocated and carried out.⁹¹ The Agrarian Union initiated land redistribution, with maximum property limits enforced on urban dwellers, introduced a progressive income tax, and established a grain-purchasing consortium which aimed to restrict the merchants' sphere of operation (and their profit) in order to do away with social "parasitism." In the private sphere, compulsory labor conscription was enforced, initially for all social layers, ethnicities and for both genders. Whereas the idea and practice of the grain consortium was doomed to failure under the pressure of external forces (the Allies intervened to insist upon its dissolution in September 1921), and restrictions on urban property were lifted after the Agrarians'

Dvizhenie prez Vŭzrazhdaneto [The Bulgarian women's movement in the national revival period] (Sofia: ALBO), pp. 212–276; Krassimira Daskalova, "Bŭlgarskite zheni v sotsialnite dvizheniia, zakoni i diskursi (1840s–1940s)" [Bulgarian women in social movements, laws, and discourses (1840s–1940s)]; Krassimira Daskalova, *Ot Siankata na Istoriata: Zhenite v Bŭlgarskoto Obshtestvo i Kultura (Sbornik ot Tekstove)* [From the shadow of history: Women in Bulgarian society and culture (A reader)] (Sofia: LIK, 1998), pp. 11–42, here p. 16. Though Daskalova's examples are mostly taken from the pre-1878 liberation period, her analysis addresses the general historical framework of women's education in the pre-1944 period, in which women's issues are subjugated to the dominant collective struggle in the name of the national good.

⁸⁹ Vladimir Migeв, "Bulgaria's political system"; Bŭlgariia mezhdŭ demokratiata i avtoritarizma [Bulgaria between democracy and authoritarianism], in Dimitŭr Sazdov, Milcho Lalkov, R. Popov, and V. Migeв (eds.), *A History of Bulgaria, 681–1960*, II, pp. 390–391; Plamen Tsvetkov and Nikolai Poppetrov, "Kŭm tipologii na politicheskoto razvitiie na Bŭlgariia prez 30-te godini" [Towards a categorization of the political development of Bulgaria in the 1930s], *Historical Review*, No. 2 (1990), pp. 63–78; Poppetrov, "Attempts to channel culture in Bulgaria," pp. 182–202.

⁹⁰ Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918*, pp. 513–514; Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, I, p. 218.

⁹¹ Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, I, pp. 217–218.

fall, other items of BANU legislation survived through the period, although with amendments. Thus, labor conscription was kept as part of men's life experience and social duty, and land legislation, including the principle of maximum holdings up to 30 hectares in arable areas, remained in force.⁹²

The paradox of policy stability amidst administrative turmoil was reflected in the reforms undertaken by various "iron-handed" Bulgarian premiers. Their legislation was often rooted in the socio-political activities and bills of their predecessors. This in particular holds true for the social (Decree-Law for Debts), economic (Decree-Law for Industry), and administrative policy of Kimon Georgiev's 16 May coup cabinet in 1934, which simply implemented the legislation initiated and debated by the politically "softer" and more cautious People's Bloc between 1931 and 1934.⁹³ Overall, state protectionism in the economic field has been acknowledged as an outstanding quality of Bulgaria's interwar period, to an extent that makes some Bulgarian historians deny the popularity of economic liberalism "in our geographical latitude" altogether.⁹⁴ Yet it is also recognized that rigidity and brutality never became part of Bulgarian state intervention in the period under consideration.⁹⁵

4. Social and demographic structure of interwar Bulgaria

Out of a population of over five million, up to the end of the period of study, nearly three quarters of Bulgarians lived in the countryside. Urbanization was at most a slowly "encroaching" process, and between 1920 and 1945 the number of urban residents increased only from 19.6 to 24.2 per cent.⁹⁶ The population of the bigger cities, however, hardly exceeded 30,000 (1934), except for the second and third biggest urban centers, Plovdiv and

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ivanov, *Political Games with the External Debt*, p. 314.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 309.

⁹⁵ See also the memoirs of Milan Drenchev, an activist of the BANU, of his political trials immediately before and after the communist takeover in Sept. 1944, and the crass contrast between the two attitudes of the two regimes towards their political opponents, in *Kratki Spomeni* [Brief memoirs] (Sofia: 2005).

⁹⁶ Ivan Stefanov, Zdravko Sugarev, Nikola Naumov, Emil Hristov, and At. Atanasov, *Demografia na Bulgaria* [A demography of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Nauka i Kultura, 1974), p. 298, in Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, II, pp. 10–12. Daskalov provides the most recent account of Bulgaria's pre-1944 population history in his second volume, pp. 9–41. His work includes a comprehensive survey of Bulgarian demographic studies from the pre- and post-1944 period.

Varna, whose population rose from 100,000 and 70,000 in 1934 to 127,000 and 77,000 in 1946. In contrast, Sofia, the capital, “boasted” a total of 287,000 dwellers, the latter increasing to 367,000 in 1946.⁹⁷

Most of the rural population were small landholders with from 3 up to 10 dekar⁹⁸ of land in their private possession. Agriculture was predominantly self-sufficient, backward (the wooden plough was still widely in use) and its yields were among the lowest in Europe. Rural overpopulation—natural increase not being matched by the far smaller increase in production and output—and a practically non-existent urban outlet to absorb the rural “hidden unemployed” had assumed the form of a lurking threat to the domestic economy ever since the end of the wars.⁹⁹ Ironically, it was precisely the poverty-stricken agricultural nature of the Bulgarian society which seemed to have “cushioned” Bulgaria from the worst repercussions of the Great Depression. Apparently, the Bulgarian peasantry had “adjusted” their public memory to a life of persistent economic cataclysms and hardship, and the short periods of relative economic prosperity (1900–1912 and 1926–1928) had left hardly any imprint.¹⁰⁰

Rapid changes were exhibited in the reproductive mode of the population, however.¹⁰¹ Although traces of demographic changes had already been seen in the pre-war period, in the late 1920s, after a short compensatory post-war baby-boom, fertility was distinctly reduced and never subsequently increased.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Ibid. pp. 11–12. As mentioned in footnote 8, no agglomeration data are indicated in the Annual Statistics from 1943–1946.

⁹⁸ 1 dekar equals 1000 square meters or 0.1 hectares.

⁹⁹ Doreen Warriner, “Introduction,” in D. Warriner (ed.), *Contrasts in Emerging Societies: Readings in the Social and Economic History of South-Eastern Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), pp. 7–10; McIntyre, *Bulgaria: Politics, Economics and Society* (London and New York: Printer Publishers, 1988), pp. 25–26; Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918*, pp. 509–510.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Ivanov, *Politicheskite Igri s Vŭnshnia Dŭlg: Bŭlgarski Siuzheti na Stopanski Krizi i Vŭzkhod, 1929–1934* [Political games with the external debt: Bulgarian plots of economic crises and progress, 1929–1934] (Izdatelstvo ‘Zlatio Boiadzhiev: 2001), pp. 305–313.

¹⁰¹ For a general overview of Europe’s demographic peculiarities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, together with comparative tables of vital statistics and including the Balkans and Bulgaria, see Michael Drake, “Population: Patterns and processes,” in Martin Pugh (ed.), *Modern European History, 1871–1945* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1997), pp. 3–24.

¹⁰² In 1952, the unusual demographic case of Bulgaria and France also captured the attention of Frank W. Notestein, author of the classic version of demographic transition theory. Yet, the existence of historical evidence for these two countries directly refuted the theory’s model of change. For further details, see footnote 4 in Simon Szreter, “The idea of demographic transition and the study of fertility change: A critical intellectual history,” *Population and Development Review*, No. 4 (Dec. 1993), pp. 659–701, here p. 693.

Table 1.1. Crude births and rates of reproduction, Bulgaria¹⁰³

	1880	1900	1930
Crude birth rates	33.7	42.2	31.3
Rates of reproduction			
Gross	—	3.18	1.90
Net	—	1.84	1.29

Falling into the so-called East European (or originally, non-European) marriage pattern characterized by early and universal nuptiality,¹⁰⁴ the population's reproduction became "prey" to the limited land resources and the (male) egalitarian inheritance system, which had brought with it rapid fragmentation of land ownership into small holdings.¹⁰⁵

Table 1.2. Percentage of age groups single in 1900¹⁰⁶

	Women			Men		
	20–24	25–29	45–49	20–24	25–29	45–49
Bulgaria	24	3	1	58	23	3
Romania ¹⁰⁷	20	8	3	67	21	3
Serbia	16	2	1	50	18	3
France	58	30	12	90	48	11
Great Britain	73	42	15	83	47	12
Sweden	80	52	19	92	61	13
Netherlands	79	44	14	89	53	13

Due to the economic peculiarities of Bulgaria and to the interwar world economic crisis, rural-urban or international migration possibilities were ruled out as an outlet for the rapidly increasing population. The steeply falling fertility rates would force contemporaries to refer to Bulgarians as

¹⁰³ Source: Robert Kuczynski (1931), pp. 30, 35, 50, 134–135, in Robert McIntyre, *Bulgaria: Politics, Economics and Society* (London and New York: Printer Publishers, 1988), p. 21. McIntyre's original table covers the period from 1880 to 1985. The cited data have been accommodated to the focus of the period under investigation.

¹⁰⁴ John Hajnal, "European marriage patterns in perspective," in David Victor Glass and David Eversley (eds.), *Population in History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), pp. 101–143.

¹⁰⁵ Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918*, pp. 203–204, 362.

¹⁰⁶ Source: John Hajnal (1964), pp. 102–103; McIntyre (1980), p. 149, in McIntyre, *Bulgaria: Politics, Economics and Society*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁷ The first data for Romania are from 1899.

“the Frenchmen of the Orient,” although the rise of effective fertility control, unlike with the French peasants, occurred in the context of very high marital proportions.¹⁰⁸ Marriage postponement as an adjustment to sustained population growth was excluded by the country’s own nuptial culture based on an early and universal marriage pattern. Direct limitation of marital fertility through effective folk methods of contraception or illegal abortion became the only adaptation to population growth for the very first generation.¹⁰⁹ This tendency was preserved throughout the twentieth century among the Bulgarian ethnic component. It, however, contrasted to the prevailing traditional (high fertility) demographic behavioral pattern of other ethnic and religious minorities.¹¹⁰

Household structure, too, underwent some significant change in the interwar period, and the average size of Bulgarian households was gradually reduced from 5.28 members in 1920 to 4 members in 1940, respectively. In the context of a predominantly nuclear household structure, this was interpreted as a conclusive sign for a shift in the reproductive model toward a two-child system.¹¹¹

In terms of age structure, in contrast to western populations, Bulgaria was a still young country. Yet tendencies of aging made themselves evident, too, and the average age of the population increased from 25.7 in 1900 to 27.3 in 1934 and 29.3 in 1946, respectively. The young-age group of 0–15 shrank from 39 per cent in 1905 to 27.9 per cent in 1946.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ McIntyre, *Bulgaria: Politics, Economics and Society*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ R. Daskalov, “Brachnost, razhdaemost i demografski prehod” [Nuptiality, births and the demographic transition], in *The Bulgarian Society*, II, pp. 16–23; Nikolay Botev, “The Story of a ‘Maverick’: Bulgaria’s fertility decline”, *Journal of Family History*, XX, No. 1 (1995), pp. 44–66; “Nuptiality in the course of the demographic transition: The experience of the Balkan countries”, *Population Studies*, No. 44 (1990), pp. 107–126; McIntyre, *Bulgaria: Politics, Economics and Society*, p. 26;

¹¹⁰ Youssef Courbage, “Demographic transition among Muslims in Eastern Europe,” *Population: An English Selection*, IV (1992), 161–186, pp. 169–175.

¹¹¹ Georgi Danailov, *Izsledvaniia vŭrhu Demografiata na Bŭlgariia* [A study of Bulgaria’s demography], (Sofia: 1930), pp. 42–45, 175–177; Naum Dolinski, “Kolichestven sŭstav na bŭlgarskoto domakinstvo, osobeno na selskoto” [The quantitative composition of Bulgarian households, in particular of rural households], in *Godishnik na Vissheto Tŭrgovsko Uchilishite—Varna* [Annual publications of the higher school of commerce—Varna], II (1928–1929), pp. 1–54; Dimitŭr Mishaikov, *Izsledvaniia vŭrhu Naselenieto na Bŭlgariia v Svravenie s Niaкои Drugi Strani* [A study of the population in Bulgaria in comparison to other countries] (Sofia: 1940), pp. 28–32; *Osnoven Kurs po Demografiia* [An introduction to demography] (Sofia: 1941), pp. 59–63.

¹¹² Anastas Toteff, “Demografsko-istoricheski Oчерk na Bŭlgariia” [A historical demographical outline of Bulgaria], in *Godishnik na Sofiiskia Universitet. Juridicheski Fakultet* [Annual Publications of Sofia University. Faculty of Law], II, No. 65 (1974), pp. 167–171.

Whereas in terms of its socio-economic peculiarities, the population was relatively homogeneous, due to Bulgaria's Ottoman legacy its confessional and ethnic composition was diverse. Its largest part consisted of Bulgarian and Roma (Gypsy) Christian Orthodox (84.4 per cent in 1934), followed by nearly 13.5 per cent of the Turkish, Pomak, and Roma Muslim ethnic-confessional group. The rest was split among Armenians, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants.¹¹³ The first Bulgarian (Tŭrnovo) constitution, enhanced by the reinforced minority rights provisions of the Neuilly settlements in 1919, acknowledged Orthodox Christianity as the dominant confession¹¹⁴ but also fully recognized the rights of all other Christian and non-Christian confessions.¹¹⁵ Matrimonial regulations were under the competence of the corresponding religious authorities, and it was only in 1945 that civil marriage registration was introduced by decree.

5. A history of Bulgarian legislation—an outline

The creation of the new Bulgarian nation-state has frequently been interpreted as a “bourgeois-democratic revolution in our territories.”¹¹⁶ It required the reconsideration of the outdated Ottoman legislation and its replacement with a new type of legal system, which would be in accord with the new socio-economic conditions in the country and especially with its politically radically transformed, pro-European orientation.¹¹⁷ In practice, the process of laying the foundations of modern Bulgarian private and public legislation initially meant the reception of various Western laws, which were progressively complemented or transformed with regard to the demands and peculiarities of the Bulgarian landscape. Three decades later, in his 1921 work *State Constitution of Bulgaria*, the lawyer, Dr Aleksandŭr Girginov, a national deputy and one of the leaders of the Democratic Party, noted the growing need for a comprehensive study of Bulgarian legislation

¹¹³ R. Daskalov, “Tursko i Pomashko Maltsinstva” [Turkish and Pomak minorities], in *The Bulgarian Society*, II, pp. 36–34. See also Maria Todorova, *Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern: Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria* (Washington, DC: American University Press, 1993), pp. 9–10.

¹¹⁴ Art. 37, “Tŭrnovska konstitutsiia ot 1879” [“The 1879 Tŭrnovo constitution”], in Metodiev and Stoianov (eds.), *Bulgarian Constitutions and Constitutional Projects*, p. 24.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Art. 40, p. 24.

¹¹⁶ Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*, p. 115.

which would bring clarity to the systematic background of its branches and do away with the accumulating chaos and inconsistency. Girginov, however, acknowledged that Bulgarian legislators had worked extraordinarily quickly, and equated the speed of their activities to a (albeit “most horrible”) *perpetuum mobile*.¹¹⁸

Western legislation, however, was not borrowed indiscriminately. The initial choice of European laws, used as foundations of what would finally emerge as the civil, trade, penal and labor branches of an indigenous Bulgarian legislation, was strictly governed by perceived criteria of modernity and democracy by Bulgarian legislators and national deputies at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. As a result, Bulgarian trade legislation became related to German, Hungarian, and Romanian law, Bulgarian penal legislation to Hungarian and Russian law, and Bulgarian labor legislation reflected the peculiarities of international (German, in particular) and native socialist labor movements as well as Bulgaria’s relationship with the International Labor Organization. Women and children, in particular, became early the target of concern of Bulgarian labor and social insurance legislation, aimed to prevent the increasing misuse in their labor in the industrial sector and to provide a one-month unpaid maternity leave in the context of a state-generated scheme of “motherist” social protectionism.¹¹⁹ Personal *Weltanschauung* considerations in the field of morality contributed to the final choice, too. Bulgarian civic legislation, including family regulations, however, originated from an indigenous interpretation of Roman, i.e., French and mostly Italian, law. According to Professor Andreev, Bulgaria’s orientation towards Roman law as the primary source of her civic legislation was not accidental. Roman civic legislation at the end of the nineteenth century seemed way ahead of German and Anglo-Saxon laws in terms of its modern, bourgeois nature. The German Civic Legislation (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*) would only be published in 1896 and come into force in 1900, i.e., nearly a decade

¹¹⁷ For a detailed account of the history of post-1878 Bulgarian law, see Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*; Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, I, pp. 82–91.

¹¹⁸ Aleksandŭr Girginov, *Dŭrzhavnoto Ustroistvo na Bŭlgariia* [State constitution of Bulgaria], pp. iii–iv.

¹¹⁹ Nikola Konstantinov, *Sotsialnoto Osigurivane v Bŭlgariia, 1888–1951* [Social insurance in Bulgaria, 1888–1951] (Sofia: Natsionalen Osiguriteln Institut, 2001); Krassimira Daskalova, “Bulgarian women in movement, laws, discourses (1840s–1940s),” *Bulgarian Historical Review*, No. 1–2 (1999), pp. 180–199; Cramp-ton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918*, p. 508.

after the Bulgarian laws on illegitimate children (12 January 1890) and on custody (24 March 1890) had been voted in the Bulgarian National Assembly. Anglo-Saxon law was eliminated on the grounds of the feudal nature of its sources (Common Law and Equity Statute).¹²⁰ However, a Bulgarian sense of morality, bound to what was perceived as family and social propriety, also played a role in the final decision-making. In 1901, the lawyer A. Vakarelski, while comparing article 213 of Bulgarian penal law on adultery to its international (French, Italian, Austrian, and English) equivalents, commented on the treatment of adultery in English law as being completely devoid of moral motivations and governed exclusively by material considerations, i.e., financial damages: “None of this here, with us!” In contrast, the law in France would guard not simply the interests of the wronged spouse but of the family, too, as “family order is a prerequisite for social order and, hence, it is justified to penalize activities which usually lead to the destruction of the family.”¹²¹ Such comments indicate that nineteenth-century Bulgarian legislators were well-read not only in the body of the Napoleonic Code Civil but also in the ideology behind it, which linked regulations of the family with social obligations and social order.

While the demands for modernization had shaped Bulgarian family legislation according to the Napoleonic Code Civil, initial legal provisions towards the family (targeting soldiers’ dependents) were introduced during the First World War under the pressure of leftist parliamentary groups. In the midst of the Balkan War, the “broad” socialists presented the first bill aimed to assist the families of conscripted men. It was followed by four other bills in March 1915, drafted by the “narrow socialists” (later communists), by the “broad” socialists, the agrarians, and by the then minister of war, Ivan Fichev. Yet, none of them became law.¹²² The outbreak of the First World War, however, coupled utter destitution to the specter of social unrest and eventually brought about the enactment of the Regulations for the Provision of Assistance to the Needy Families of Enlisted Soldiers.¹²³

¹²⁰ Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*, pp. 116–117, 130, 164.

¹²¹ A. Vakarelski, “Kŭm chlen 213 ot nakazatelnia zakon” [On article 312 of the penal law], *Spisanie na Iuridicheskoto Druzhestvo v Sofiia* [Journal of the Juridical Association], I, (September 1901), pp. 32–42, 38–39.

¹²² Ianulov, *Bulgaria’s Social Policy*, p. 62. For a more detailed account of the history of the first state provisions in the field of welfare for soldiers’ families, see *ibid.*, pp. 62–78.

¹²³ *Pravilnik za Podpomagane na Nuzhdaeshtite se Voimishki Semeistva prez Vreme na Mobilizatsiia i Voina*, *ibid.*, p. 62.

In October 1915, a centrally governed fund was established to assist all dependent kin of enlisted men up to and including grandchildren and grandparents.¹²⁴ The families of the killed and severely wounded were paid until they received war-widows' pensions. In 1916, the allowance given to those with agricultural income was decreased in order to accommodate the requirements of the urban neediest; and everyone over sixteen, male and female, was obliged to find work rather than subsist on the benefit payment. Welfare payment was to continue until one month after the demobilization. The harsher post-1918 reality, however, placed new demands on the Bulgarian state in the welfare field, including the adoption of a protectionist approach towards the family.

¹²⁴ The following account is based on Crampton, *Bulgaria 1879–1918*, pp. 489–490.

CHAPTER I

Building up a Maternal and Child Healthcare Service



1. An “orange” start: The BANU’s Bill for People’s Health (1923)

Economic destruction, political instability and demoralization followed a series of failures to achieve national unification through war. In the expressive and metaphorical language of Dr Raiko Daskalov,¹ Minister of the Interior and People’s Health (1922–1923), Bulgaria resembled a “sick man on his death bed,” desperate, helpless, and with no self-esteem, “staring at his open grave.”² It thus became the BANU’s duty and responsibility to “close the gaping grave” and “wash, cleanse and balm the ulcers full of coagulated blood and puss, placing clean and disinfected dressings on the wounds.”³ Numerous social reforms were undertaken in practice or initiated legislatively within a short period in order to meet the expectations of “the broad peasant masses” and to “avoid the revolution which inevitably follows such catastrophes.”⁴

In February 1923, a new Bill for People’s Health was placed before the Parliament for consideration. Pressed by lack of time,⁵ by the hostile reac-

¹ Raiko Daskalov (1886–1923): member of the BANU (since 1913); Commander-in-Chief of the so-called Revolutionary Republican Army during the Radomir soldiers’ uprising (Sept. 1918); proclaimed the “Radomir Republic”; National Deputy at the XVIIIth (1919–1920), XIXth (1920–1923), XXth (1923) ONA; Minister of Agriculture (Oct. 1919–May 1920), of Commerce, Industry, and Labor (May 1920–Jan. 1922), Minister of the Interior and People’s Health (Jan. 1922–Feb. 1923); assassinated in Prague (Aug. 1923). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 142–143.

² Raiko Daskalov, “V kakvo polozhenie beshe Bŭlgariia, kogato poekhme vlastta? V kakvo tia e dnes?” [In what situation was Bulgaria, when we took over the power? In what situation is she now?], in Raiko Daskalov, *Izbrani Statii i Rechii* [Selected articles and speeches] (Sofia: Fondatsiia “Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski,” 1947), pp. 108–109, here p. 108.

³ Daskalov, “In what situation was Bulgaria, when we took over the power?,” p. 109.

⁴ Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Zakonodatelnata Deinist na Obnovitelnoto XIX Selsko Narodno Sŭbranie* [The legislative activities of the reviving XIXth Peasant National Assembly] (Sofia: Pечатnitsa “Ivan K. Bozhilov,” 1924), p. 4.

⁵ Stamboliiski, *The Legislative Activities of the Reviving XIXth Peasant National Assembly*, p. 41.

tion of the parliamentary group of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the XIXth National Assembly,⁶ and by doctors “from below” as well,⁷ the bill was returned to the respective parliamentary commissions for reassessment and was never brought back to the National Assembly for consideration. However, although it did not become law, the BANU’s Bill for People’s Health left its imprint on Bulgaria’s social policies toward the family by introducing into Bulgarian politics the notion of preventive medicine and positive eugenics, while also touching upon the sensitive problems of child mortality and maternal healthcare.

AN “ORANGE” IDEOLOGY OF HEALTHCARE

During what was supposed to become his life-long imprisonment for personal offences against King Ferdinand in 1915, Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski,⁸ the BANU’s leader and ideologist, started outlining the twenty-five principles of the Agrarian Union, which he published, albeit in an incomplete version, in 1919. These principles, coupled with the painful requirements of the moment (the Neuilly settlements, subordination to the Allied commission on disarmament and reparations, as well as the need to find prompt

⁶ The notorious refusal of the Bulgarian Communist Party, which ran second in the elections for the XIXth National Assembly, to cooperate with or assist the BANU government has been covered both in Bulgarian and in Western historiography. Here, it would be enough to point out the communists’ comparison of the BANU’s programme to “a state of fever.” For further details, see Svetla Daskalova and Dimitŭr Tashev (eds.), *Raiko Daskalov: Izbrani Proizvedeniia* [Raiko Daskalov: Selected works], 2 vols. (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1986), I, p. 244. For literature in English, see John Bell, *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899–1923* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 143–144; Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria*, pp. 84–86. For the latest and most complete review of the BANU in Bulgarian historiography, see Roumen Daskalov, *Ot Stambolov do Zhivkov: Golemite Sporove za Novata Bŭlgarska Istoriia* [From Stambolov to Zhivkov: The great disputes in modern Bulgarian history] (Sofia: Izdatelska kŭsheta “Gutenberg,” 2009), pp. 121–186.

⁷ Prof. Dr Dobrin Migeŭ, “Raiko Daskalov—ministŭr na vŭtreshnite raboti v samostoiatelnoto upravlenie na BZNS” [Raiko Daskalov—minister of the interior in the independent cabinet of the BANU], in *Raiko Daskalov—Politicheska i Dŭrzhavna Deinost. Privestviia i Dokladi, Izneseni na Natsionalnoto Tŭrzhestveno Sŭbranie i na Nauchnata Sesiia po Sluchai 100 Godini ot Rozhdenieto na Raiko Daskalov* [Raiko Daskalov—His political and state work. Greetings and papers at the solemn meeting and academic session dedicated to the celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of Raiko Daskalov] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1988), pp. 145–164, here p. 161.

⁸ Stamboliiski, Aleksandŭr (1879–1923): leader of the BANU, National Deputy at the XIVth (1908–1911), XVIth (1913), XVIIth (1914–1919), XVIIIth (1919–1920), XIXth (1920–1923), XXth (1923) ONA, and Vth GNA (1911); Minister of Public Buildings, Roads and Public Affairs (Jan 1919–Oct. 1919); Prime Minister (Oct 1919–9 June 1923); Minister of War (Oct. 1919–June 1921), of Foreign Affairs and Cults (June 1921–9 June 1923); initiator and implementer of major political, economic, and social reforms in Bulgaria; assassinated after the 9 June 1923 coup. For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 420–422.

solutions to the refugee influx and subsequent housing crisis), would underlie the Agrarians’ policies during their short rule. They tackled ideological issues like the democratic and egalitarian political, economic, social, racial, and religious organization of the new Bulgarian society—with the intention of extending their democratic nature to the establishment of vital public services (including a free, universal and expanded educational system and universally affordable judicial services). Importantly, the principles also included an outline of the envisaged measures in the field of public health and social welfare. “The improvement of people’s health by all possible means” was to become a state target. The number of hospitals and sanatoriums was to be increased, a traveling medical service organized, and plans introduced for improved hygienic conditions in dwellings and public buildings (e.g., schools). Family and child welfare was to be included in the scope of the state’s activities, in tandem with the discouragement of pubs and brothels. The Twelfth Principle promoted the institution of marriage and the protection of children of both sexes, and raised the issue of tax benefits and job privileges for people with families to support. Its eventual objective was the “moral recovery” and “strengthening” of the Bulgarian nation, whereby the society as a whole and youth in particular would be targeted.⁹

The BANU’s ideas should be analyzed within the framework of its package of visions for modernization and the building of a new type of society. These were promulgated by Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski as early as in 1905 in the BANU newspaper, *Zemedelsko Zname* [Agrarian banner], and in his 1909 monograph, *Political Parties or Estatist¹⁰ Organizations*.¹¹ The final goal was a constitutional, estatist, labor-based state, where the improvement of human resources, central for the country’s economy, had to be secured by

⁹ Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Printsipite na Bŭlgarskiia Zemedelski Sŭiuz* [The principles of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa na Z. D. Vidolov, 1919), pp. 24–25.

¹⁰ The term “estates” is a literal translation of the Bulgarian term *sŭslovie*, used by John Bell and Richard Crampton in their histories of the BANU and of Bulgaria. In the ideology of the BANU, *sŭslovie* was the term employed to describe the occupational division of society (agrarian, artisanal, wage-laboring, entrepreneurial, commercial, and bureaucratic) in contrast to the idea of social antagonistic classes, which Stamboliiski rejected. According to Stamboliiski, the ideologist of the BANU, members of a *sŭslovie* shared common economic occupations but might have different social backgrounds, so that an agricultural small-holder would be the member of the same estate as the large landowner. For further details, see Bell, *Peasants in Power*, pp. 64–68; Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria*, p. 55.

¹¹ Aleksandŭr Stamboliiski, *Politicheski Partii ili Sŭslovni Organizatsii* [Political parties or estatist organizations] (Sofia, 1909).

the state itself through universal education and public health.¹² The vision of Bulgaria's future, as editorially mooted by Stamboliiski in the spring of 1922, was a "model agricultural state," resting on the idea of "labor property," where, according to his friend and associate, Dr Raiko Daskalov, "the land belongs to those who till it." "Labor property" according to the Agrarians was defined as property directly utilized by its owner to provide for himself and his family.¹³

The very notion of labor held a multiple and complex meaning in the BANU's ideology and in the conceptual framework of Bulgarian society in the immediate post-war period. In the words of historian John Bell, the BANU's program demonstrated "the fascinating mixture of ideology, necessity, and politics, with creative breakthroughs and unexpected setbacks that commonly appear when 'ideological men' come in from the cold of opposition to build a new world from the materials of the old."¹⁴ The Neuilly settlements had driven the most representative members of the country's intelligentsia to appeal to the nation's courage and optimism about its future, which, in return, was associated with labor creativity. The popular writer, Stoian Mikhailovski, had called upon his compatriots: "Heads up, Bulgarians! Brace yourselves and settle to work! Do not be intimidated by the term 'loser.' An invincible spirit creates an invincible labor force!" Stamboliiski, a pacifist himself,¹⁵ and Raiko Daskalov had also appealed to the people symbolically to replace the sword with the ploughshare and to rectify the consequences of the wars with "spiritual disarmament," as well as "with labor and reforms."¹⁶

Characterized by his ex-associates as a "materialist," for whom "the world is here and he is quick, he wants everything that will be done to be done in a few years—he will not wait,"¹⁷ Stamboliiski undertook firmly to imple-

¹² Bell, *Peasants in Power*, p. 63.

¹³ *Zemедельско Zname* [Agrarian banner], No. 58 (27 October 1920), p. 1, in Bell, *Peasants in Power*, p. 163.

¹⁴ For further details, see Bell, *Peasants in Power*, p. 161.

¹⁵ See also the favorable international reputation that Stamboliiski held among his contemporaries as "the first politician from the Balkans who thought of the good of his country otherwise than in terms of war and annexation" and as "a marked precursor of pacified Europe." For further details, see Carlo Sforza, *Makers of Modern Europe: Portraits and Personal Impressions and Recollections* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1930), p. 285.

¹⁶ For further details on Stamboliiski, see Paun Genov, *Zemiata Beshe Tvoiia Zhrebii* [Land was your destiny] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1989), p. 246. On Raiko Daskalov, see Daskalova and Tishev, *Raiko Daskalov: Selected works*, p. 222.

¹⁷ Dragiev, *Edna Politicheska Izpoved* [Political confessions] (Sofia: 1919), p. 8, in Bell, *Peasants in Power*, p. 142. See also Count Sforza's reference on p. 281 to Stamboliiski as a prophet, "one of the Europeans who saw farthest into the future," who "paid for it with his life."

ment his visions of the nation’s future in his domestic policy. The “revitalization” rhetoric found its legal expression in the preamble of the BANU’s People’s Health Bill, as “a sound spirit in a sound body” was turned into the prerequisite to secure the nation’s existence among modern societies entwined in an “intense struggle for survival.”¹⁸ The development of the state’s economy required spiritual growth and creativity,¹⁹ and the state of the nation’s health and welfare became vital measurements of the country’s cultural development and prosperity:

It is only the radical reorganization of our healthcare legislation which would yield the desired results expected by the state’s investments—a healthy and strong nation, capable of meeting all the challenges of civilization and preserving its independence amongst the culturally elevated countries of the world. Any merely bureaucratic approach toward healthcare has to be dropped on the spot and instead, the slogan of public health should be raised: “Healthcare comes as a priority; the people’s health comes above all!”²⁰

However, the vision of public health was tied to personal and social morality, and to a labor ethic peculiar to the Orange ideology and the popular public outlook. Recalling a traditional Bulgarian saying according to which private wealth would last no longer than three generations, Stamboliiski interpreted excessive wealth as the force which would extinguish the creative labor impulse in human beings and hence lead to the erosion of moral and family underpinnings. Similar to poverty, which threw man into sin and despair, private wealth which manifestly exceeded the labor capability of its owner likewise perverted and degenerated human nature. It was both a social and a personal evil, as it encouraged “parasitism, luxury and debauchery,”²¹ and carried with it the threat of sexual promiscuity and venereal diseases spreading among future generations. The rich man’s pampered body carried the ulcers of his own moral and physical disintegration,

¹⁸ For further details, see Genov, *Land was Your Destiny*, p. 247.

¹⁹ Raiko Daskalov, “Za novia zakon za narodnoto zdrave” [On the new Law regarding the People’s Health], in Svetla Daskalova and Dimitür Tishev (eds.), *Raiko Daskalov: Izbrani Statii i Rechi* [Selected articles and speeches] (Sofia: Fondatsiia “Aleksandür Stamboliiski,” 1947), p. 288.

²⁰ Daskalov, “On the new Law regarding the People’s Health,” pp. 288–289.

²¹ Stamboliiski, *The Principles of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union*, p. 50.

being incapable of producing healthy offspring or of reproduction at all.²² Hence, society would perform a truly charitable act upon affluent families by legally depriving them of their disproportionate wealth and redirecting them to a labor-inspired, moral lifestyle and attitude.²³

Labor ethics thus paved the path for national spiritual and physical regeneration. The BANU's land reform act in 1921, as well as the introduction of the institution of Compulsory Labor Service (CLS)²⁴ earlier in 1920, proved that the Agrarians' sense of social justice and desire to promote economic development and modernization went alongside the idea of the reinvigoration of societal morality. The preamble to the initial law for CLS emphasized the necessity to cultivate youth's labor capital as an essential, yet currently dispersed, source of social wealth, alongside the need to revitalize the country after the "horrendous devastations of the wars," and thus contribute to the economic progress of Bulgaria.²⁵ In his report on the institution of CLS in Bulgaria, Prof. Max Lazard, a labor expert at the League of Nations, described how lectures on health and hygiene had become part of the CLS training program and how its administration prepared tracts on particular health problems for distribution among males. During the first half of 1922, these pamphlets dealt with tuberculosis, the preservation of eyesight, and venereal diseases.²⁶

²² Stamboliiski's elaborations on surplus wealth and its parasitic, degenerating nature shows similarities to those of English zoologist Edwin Ray Lankester (1847–1929), who questioned the optimistic, biologically progressive course of evolution and accepted that some species might regress biologically to lower forms of life. Lankester had applied the same views to explain social developments over time, including the decline of ancient Roman civilization: "Rome degenerated when possessed of the riches of the ancient world. The habit of parasitism clearly acts upon animal organization in this way. Let the parasitic life once be secured, and away go legs, jaws, eyes, and ears; the active, highly-gifted crab, insect, or annelid may become a mere sac, absorbing nourishment and laying eggs." For further details, see Edwin Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan, 1907 [Reprint]), p. 33, quoted after Richard Milner, "Huxley's bulldog: The battles of E. Ray Lankester (1846–1929)," *The Anatomical Record (New Anatomist)*, Vol. 257, No. 3 (1999), p. 92, in Christian Promitzer, "The issue of degeneration and the origins of eugenics in Bulgaria (1900–1929)," pp. 2–3. Lankester's work had been translated into Russian in 1883 and in turn from Russian into Bulgarian in 1897, and was enthusiastically received in the Bulgarian socialist media. Initially, Stamboliiski, too, had sympathized with social democratic ideas. https://online.uni-graz.at/kfu_online/wbLdb2.downloadDocument?pLstNr=179194&pLstSchichtNr=5184333&pDocStoreNr=113110; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50–52.

²⁴ Contemporaries claimed that this carried the strong impact of Stamboliiski's personal ideas. See the speech of Khristo Mutafov, in *Stenografski Dnevitsi na XIX ONS, I Izvünredna Sesia, 1 Zasedanie* [Minutes of the XIXth ONA, I Emergency Session (ES), 1 Meeting (M)] (15 April 1920), p. 112.

²⁵ Aleksandür Stamboliiski, "Motivi kŭm Zakonoproekta za Trudova Povinnost" [Preamble to the Bill for Compulsory Labor Service], *Minutes of the XIXth ONA, I ES, 3 M* (24 April 1920), p. 110.

²⁶ Mark Lazard, *Compulsory Labor Service in Bulgaria* (Geneva, 1922), pp. 54–55, in Bell, *Peasants in Power*, p. 173.

The introduction of compulsory premarital certificates for men in the 1923 Health Bill was yet another measure envisaged by the BANU to curb congenital contagious diseases and improve the quality of Bulgaria’s future generations.²⁷ So far, the Bulgarian Church had considered certain mental and physical illnesses, such as epilepsy, madness, debility, sexual impotence, but also chronic drunkenness as impediments of both a public and private character for any marriage, and in certain cases, as a factor justifying divorce. In his paper given at the Dermatological Association in early 1924, Prof. Dr Stefan Tsankov, the official legal representative of the Holy Synod, pointed to the relevance of compulsory pre-matrimonial medical examinations for the general well-being and prosperity of the family. He praised the efforts of the Berlin Association for Racial Hygiene for introducing compulsory premarital medical examinations in 1916–1917, though he also admitted their ultimate failure. He referred to marriages as acts of both personal and public significance, thus linking the creation of a new family with the common public good and social interest. In his opinion, it was only the lack of favorable circumstances in Bulgarian everyday life, in particular the insufficient number of qualified doctors, that would place serious obstacles to the implementation of otherwise desirable pre-nuptial examinations among the population.²⁸

Contextualized in the light of the already existing matrimonial regulations of the Church—with whom, admittedly, the BANU was not on friendly terms—any effort on the part of the “Orange” government to introduce pre-marital certificates served a dual, political purpose. While its positive eugenic intentions can hardly be doubted, it should also be recognized that the foreseen provisions were a clear-cut attempt on the part of the state to intrude into the realms of the Holy Synod and curtail the exclusive privileges of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church over marriage.

Children in agricultural societies are traditionally valued as an indispensable social and labor capital actively contributing to the peasant fam-

²⁷ Article 99 in “Zakonoproekt za narodnoto zdrave” [Bill for People’s Health], *Minutes of the XIXth ONA*, 45 M (1 February 1923), p. 964.

²⁸ For further details, see Stefan Tsankov, “Bolestite v bŭlgarskoto brachno pravo” [Illnesses in Bulgarian matrimonial law], in *Leksii Vŭrkhu Semeistvoto na Bŭlgarskoto Dermatologicheskoto Druzhestvo, Dŭrzhani prez Fevruari i Mart 1924* [Lectures of the Bulgarian Dermatological Association delivered in February and March 1924] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa “Khudozhnik,” 1924), pp. 2–3, 6–7, 9.

ily's economic welfare and their parents' security on reaching old age. In his parliamentary speech accompanying the Bill for People's Health, Raiko Daskalov stressed the unacceptability of the high mortality rates amongst the population, which, in his words, exceeded forty per cent in some places and thus was destroying the productive forces of the nation. While the reproduction rates approached fifty to sixty per cent in some rural areas, the numerous deaths among children nullified these positive figures. "Thus, families lose massive productive capacities and suffer enormous economic losses," the minister of the interior and of people's health complained.²⁹ In his review of the legislative activities of the XIXth ONA, Stamboliiski, too, referred to the same data and placed the blame for the enormous death tolls amongst children on the lack of elementary hygiene and the shortage of professional midwives in rural areas.³⁰ Preventive medicine, i.e., hygienic arrangements and sanitation, as well as premarital certificates for men were the state's new remedy to combat the high mortality figures amongst the general population and their children.³¹

The main emphasis of the BANU's Bill for People's Health rested on the idea of a decentralized, municipally focused health system,³² where ineffective medical intervention had to be replaced by the socially- and health-friendly approach of preventive medicine. However, while shifting its interest towards prophylaxis, the state was not supposed to withdraw entirely from its "charitable duties and care for the sick and suffering." It was admitted that private charity organizations in Bulgaria were still too weak to bear the financial costs of hygienic measures; hence, the state had to continue

²⁹ Raiko Daskalov, "Motivi kŭm Zakonoproekta za Narodnoto Zdrave" [Preamble to the Bill for People's Health], *Minutes of the XIXth ONA*, 45 M (1 February 1923), p. 963.

³⁰ Stamboliiski, *Legislative Activities of the Reviving XIXth Peasant National Assembly*, p. 42.

³¹ Ibid; Daskalov, "Preamble to the Bill for People's Health," p. 963.

³² According to article 3 of the Tŭrnovo constitution, Bulgaria was administratively divided, in ascending order, into municipalities [*obshtini*], districts [*okolii*] and regions [*okrŭzi*]. Municipalities, both rural and urban, comprised the primary administrative units, represented by a local, minimum eight-member elective government and headed by a mayor. Its primary duty was to attend to local affairs. Until 1934, regions were the largest administrative divisions, whose elective councils represented the state's power in their territories. There is no agreed translation of these Bulgarian administrative terms into English, and various textbooks and websites on Bulgaria offer their own, frequently confusing translations. For further details on Bulgaria's pre-1934 administrative divisions, see Aleksandŭr Girginov, *Dŭrzhavnoto Ustroistvo na Bŭlgariia* [State constitution of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Izdanie na "Bŭlgarski Pechat," 1921), pp. 368, 477–481, 510–511, 523–524; Veselin Metodiev and Lŭchezar Stoianov (eds.), *Bŭlgarski Konstitutsii i Konstitutsionni Proekti* [Bulgarian constitutions and constitutional projects] (Sofia: Dŭrzhavno izdatelstvo Dr Petŭr Beron, 1990), p. 21.

financing some major healthcare institutions. The transition from state support to regional control of hospitals was envisaged as a gradual process, spanning a period of five years, which would allow the local administrative bodies to adjust their budgets to their new financial responsibilities. In addition, the state or the respective regions would continue to finance the municipal sanitary initiatives by covering up to fifty per cent of their expenditures, either in cash or by providing free CLS.³³

In legislative terms, preventive medicine meant imposing strict measures against the transmission of infectious diseases and against the spread of common childhood diseases (measles, chickenpox, parotitis, whooping cough) or those affecting offspring (tuberculosis and venereal disease). Isolation or hospitalization of patients suffering from an infectious disease became obligatory, while the concealment of incidents of contagious disease was liable to penalty. If annual mortality rates in a municipality exceeded the country's average mortality rate over a period of five years, the regional council of hygiene was obliged to set up a special commission to look into the possible causes and draw up a report. A special department was envisaged at the Directorate of People's Health, whose primary objective was to fight malaria, tuberculosis, venereal disease, alcoholism, child mortality and other “social evils.” A special hygiene fund was to support the Directorate's activities. It was to be financed with ten per cent of the total state income from VAT, from private wills and from donations, along with fines imposed by the Supreme Medical Council on inefficient municipal, district and regional councils of hygiene.

The subsequent parliamentary disputes shed little additional light on the BANU's intentions to build a child healthcare system. The “Orange” Health Bill was boycotted in the Parliament by the communists, who were inspired by the Soviet model of state controlled healthcare, and treated it as yet another futile bourgeois attempt to circumvent the true social nature of health problems in Bulgaria.³⁴ After its first hearing on 3 February 1923, the bill was sent back to the respective commission for reconsideration and nothing was heard of it again.

³³ *Minutes of the XIXth ONA, III RS, 47 M* (3 February 1923), p. 963.

³⁴ See the speeches of Dr Saparev and Vasil Muletarov, in *Minutes of the XIXth ONA, III RS, 47 M* (3 February 1923), p. 1018.

NON-CODIFIED PROVISIONS FOR MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTHCARE

Not all healthcare provisions, as outlined by the 1923 Health Bill, were originally the BANU's idea (for instance, smallpox vaccination had been first introduced in Bulgaria in 1845 by Sultan Mahmud and had ever since been part of Bulgaria's healthcare service).³⁵ A number of the measures foreseen in the BANU health bill, too, had been part of long-standing discussions in the public realm. Bulgarian medical authorities had been divided into two camps—into “orahovists” and “rusevists” (according to the names of their leading “ideologists,” Dr Orahovats and Dr Marin Rusev). The principal conflict between these two groups reflected the difference between the two ideological schools of education they belonged—the Russian model of healthcare, oriented towards prophylaxis, state-generated preventive medicine and a general suspicion towards private medical therapy, and the contemporary western type of health service, centered on a curative approach and private medical treatment.³⁶ In practice, the western, “rusevist,” ideas of private treatment and healthcare found little ground for implementation in the backward Bulgarian peasant society of the late nineteenth-century and early-twentieth century.³⁷ Bulgaria's first health act, Contemporary Regulations for the Administration of the Medical Service in Bulgaria (1 February 1879), had been drafted by Dr Dimitŭr Mollov on Russian demand and had followed the Russian administrative model. It had guaranteed free hospital treatment for the needy as well as free access to medication and free, universal ambulatory treatment for the population. Healthcare, however, had exclusively focused on curative intervention, while social hygiene was underdeveloped.³⁸ In 1903, a new Law for People's Health had been passed (an intellectual “product” of the “western” Dr Rusev);³⁹ yet its provisions were soon felt to be outdated. Thirteen new bills had followed after 1903, the last one during the BANU's coalition rule in 1919.⁴⁰ Yet, the 1923 Bill was recognized as an independent legislative attempt, encouraged and

³⁵ Ivan Golesmanoff, *League of Nations. Health Organisation: The Public Health Services of Bulgaria* (Geneva: 1926), p. 36.

³⁶ R. Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, II, pp. 51–52.

³⁷ Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, II, p. 52.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁰ See speech of G. Petrov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS, 43 M* (21 February 1928), p. 776.

supervised by Raiko Daskalov and drafted by Velichko Georgiev,⁴¹ director of the General Directorate of People’s Health under the BANU’s rule (1920–1923) and first organizer of the institution of school healthcare service in Bulgaria.⁴²

The zest of the Agrarians’ for initiatives enacting preventive health measures in practice, even before any health bill was presented to the National Assembly, was truly impressive, and was also reflected in their budget. Five years after the tragic ending of the BANU’s last cabinet, national deputy Ts. Stoianchev emphasized that the Agrarians had been the only government in modern Bulgarian history to prioritize the funding of the Directorate of People’s Health above that of the police. Out of a total state budget of 2,684,699,803 levs for the financial 1921–1922 year, 74,153,220 levs (2.76%) had been channeled for health issues, while the considerably smaller sum of 56,597,810 levs (2.10%) was directed to the police. Stoianchev noted that to that time, Bulgarian political life had known no other figure like Raiko Daskalov, who preferred to be called “Minister of Health” rather than “Minister of the Police.”⁴³

Within the short period of its independent power, the BANU took prompt measures against the spread of venereal diseases carried by the demobilized soldiers (fourteen per cent of returning soldiers suffered from syphilis and another twenty-one per cent from gonorrhea). In 1919, the Central Council of Hygiene had been ordered to inquire into the population’s vital statistics and especially into mortality causes,⁴⁴ and since 1920 a strict registration of persons suffering from syphilis had been introduced. Final reports had been forwarded to the Directorate of People’s Health, and in 1922 and in 1923 two squads organized by the Directorate had been sent

⁴¹ Velichko Georgiev, Dr (1872–1924): trained in medicine (France, 1897); director of the General Directorate of People’s Health (1920–1923), organizer of the school healthcare service in Bulgaria, author of the 1923 Bill for People’s Health. Georgiev was the first to voice the necessity for an independent Ministry of People’s Health in Bulgaria. For further details, see *Entsiklopediia Bŭlgariia* [Encyclopedia Bulgaria] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1981), II, p. 76.

⁴² Ibid; D. Migevev, “Raiko Daskalov—Minister of the Interior in the independent cabinet of the BANU,” pp. 160–161; Miladin Apostolov, *Istoriia na Meditsinata i Sotsialното Delo* [A history of medicine and social welfare] (Sofia: 1994), p. 85; Dimitrina Petrova, *Dr Raiko Daskalov: Politik i Dŭrzhawnik-reformator* [Dr Raiko Daskalov: Politician, statesman, and reformer] (Stara Zagora: Izdatelstvo “Znanie,” 1995), pp. 28–37.

⁴³ Speech of Ts. Stoianov, BANU—“Vrabcha-1,” *Minutes of XXIIInd ONA, I RS, 40 M* (8 February 1928), p. 706.

⁴⁴ See also the recognition given to the activities of the Central Council of Hygiene by communist MP Dr M. Saparev, *Minutes of XIXth ONA, III RS, 45 M* (1 February 1923), p. 976.

out to the area along the Bulgarian–Serbian border in order to examine the population there and to carry out blood tests on everyone who did not show clinical symptoms.⁴⁵ As popular ignorance about the nature, transmission and prophylaxis of venereal diseases was recognized as one of the principal causes of their prevalence, the health administration had started organizing evening lectures amongst the population and carried out propaganda in the schools. According to Golesmanov's report, lessons on sexual issues were given to children in elementary schools.⁴⁶ A booklet entitled *The Dangers of Venereal Diseases and Alcoholism for the Peasant Population*, published in 1922 by the editorial of the *Selski Glas* [Peasants' voice], a weekly newspaper of the BANU, confirms that the state's struggle against venereal diseases and alcohol-consumption had started prior to the 1923 Bill. It aimed to reduce concomitantly the high attendant mortality rates among the population by raising awareness of the consequences of "these public disasters." Propaganda and education, however, were also perceived as a necessary preventive measure to prepare the ground for the decentralization of power and the increased responsibility of the municipalities and of common people towards public healthcare.⁴⁷

Although not specifically singled out in the BANU's Health Bill, the status and duties of midwives (alongside these of doctors, feldshers and nurses) were targeted in the expected legislative health act. By 1915 two attempts had been made, in 1895 and 1909, to start midwifery courses in Bulgaria; yet, both initiatives had been aborted soon afterwards (in 1900 and in 1915, respectively). Under the BANU's rule, however, fully-licensed, two-year courses were instituted for midwives in Sofia in 1920, while in 1922, shorter, ten-month courses were organized in the bigger cities for midwives desiring to practice in rural areas.⁴⁸ As a result, the number of licensed midwives had increased threefold: from a total of 286 in 1914 to 935 in 1924. While 549 midwives were employed in urban areas, the countryside had been equipped with 286 professional midwives, ready

⁴⁵ Golesmanoff, *The Public Health Services of Bulgaria*, p. 56.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁷ V. Bogomil, *Opasnostta za Selskoto Naselenie ot Venericheski Bolesti i ot Piianstvoto* [The danger of venereal diseases and alcoholism for the peasant population] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa "Proizvodstvena kooperatsiia 'Süglasie,'" 1922), p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, IV (1984), pp. 138–141.

to be “called upon at any hour of the day or night.”⁴⁹ According to the 1923 Health Bill, the training and qualification of midwives had to comply with the requirements of the Supreme Medical Council, the expert advisory institution at the Directorate of People’s Health. Thus, legally and medically, the BANU considered placing natal care under immediate state control, in an attempt to eliminate the traditional obstetric services offered by old women called *babi*.⁵⁰

In 1923, the BANU imposed a meticulous reorganization of the registration of the movement of the population. This required the notification of births, marriages and deaths by the official registrar or by the mayor at the time of the declaration, which was not to exceed a week’s time. Birth notification was made by the father or, failing him, by the doctor, the midwife, or a witness of the delivery. The birth and sex of the child were verified by the medical officer of the municipality or by the registrar. Still-born children, defined as having “never breathed after birth,” were registered too, though in a special, colored form. If, however, the infant had shown the slightest sign of life, the registrar was obliged to prepare separate birth and death certificates.⁵¹

Journalism, which had been a significant instrument in the BANU’s strategies to raise the intellectual and moral standards of the common people ever since the formation of the Agrarian Union in 1899,⁵² was resorted

⁴⁹ Golesmanoff, *The Public Health Services of Bulgaria*, pp. 18–19, 61. A similar approach was applied to feldshers, i.e., medical aides. Owing to an extreme shortage of doctors in the countryside (in 1923, there had been 908 Bulgarian and some 200 refugee Russian doctors in Bulgaria, one quarter of whom were concentrated in the capital), Stamboliiski’s cabinet had amended the 1903 Health Law in 1921 in order to accommodate non-commissioned officers and all privates of the medical corps in the health service as feldshers. Primarily, feldshers had been intended to replace the doctor’s service if such were unavailable and under the 1909 amendment of the Health Law, the rank of feldsher had been granted to persons who had passed the state examination after having completed a two-year course at a civil or military feldshers’ college. Under the BANU’s new regulations, however, the number of feldshers increased from 468 in 1914 to 1,735 by the end of 1923, one third of who were directly employed in the public health service.

⁵⁰ *Babi* is the plural of the Bulgarian term *baba*, literally “grandmother.” In traditional culture, it also denoted a wise woman or traditional (unlicensed) midwife.

⁵¹ Golesmanoff, *The Public Health Services of Bulgaria*, pp. 69–70.

Among its numerous purposes, a sophisticated vital statistics system is also instrumental for government officials to analyze and draw up preventive measure against high death rates. Universal and high quality public health information is recognized as a necessary item of the institutional machinery to identify those afflicted by the worst health problems, and to address the epidemiological problems caused by rapid economic growth and increasing density of urban settlement. For further details, see Simon Szreter, *Health and Wealth: Studies in History and Policy* (University of Rochester Press, 2005). For a concise elaboration on the same topic, see <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-34.html>; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

⁵² Bell, *Peasants in Power*, p. 77.

to in order to raise the population's awareness of maternal and child health issues. A booklet, entitled *Pregnancy and Women*, appeared on the book market in January 1923, sponsored, as stated in a handwritten note on its front cover, by "state support."⁵³ The author's preface indicated that the monograph was intended as a course-book for the newly-established, ten-month midwifery courses at Sofia, Pleven and Varna hospitals as there was hardly literature available on pregnancy issues in Bulgaria. Deploring the "contemporary morality" of Bulgarian society, according to which any public reference to pregnancy and birth was considered as scandalous and shameful, the author, Dr Mincho Popov, emphasized the necessity to overcome the population's resistance towards modernization and divert its outlook from superstitious customs and religious rites to "scientific truth."⁵⁴ Most of all, Popov pleaded to spare women's lives in birth pangs, as, in Bulgaria, what elsewhere would be a "normal event" in a woman's life was likely to become her deathbed. If common people knew the advantages of modern medicine and hygiene, no ignorant *babi* would be allowed to assist in childbirth and no woman waiting to deliver would ever be placed in miserably overcrowded rooms, amidst the sick or dying.⁵⁵ Popov advocated education and modern medical assistance as the way to save the health and lives of women and thus allow them to contribute to their families and to society, too.⁵⁶

Little has been written on the BANU's attitude towards women and the family, and no proper research has been carried out on this topic so far.⁵⁷ If, however, the literature of memoirs and parliamentary minutes

⁵³ Mincho Popov, *Bremenostta u Zhenata* [Pregnancy in women] (Pleven: Pechatnitsa "Gutenberg," 1923). A copy of the book with the above-mentioned note is kept in the National Library in Sofia.

⁵⁴ Popov, *Pregnancy in Women*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 50, 66.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ A recent study of Bulgarian diplomatic families in the period under observation, however, sheds light on Stamboliiski's remarkable attitude towards well-educated and publicly influential women, illustrated by the official appointment of young Nadejda Stancioff, later Lady Muir, as a fully-fledged delegate to the Neuilly peace settlements and the international post-Paris conferences in Genoa, 1920, and Lausanne, 1923. Thanks to her outstanding foreign language skills, industry and personal capabilities, combined with a pleasant personality and dedication to the national cause, Stamboliiski entrusted Nadejda to participate in all international negotiations, and in 1921, appointed her first secretary to the Bulgarian legation in Washington, D.C. In the words of historian Mari Firkatian, it was by no mere chance that Nadejda Stancioff became Bulgaria's first female diplomatic representative and one of the very few women in the international political life of her time. Her path-breaking career under the BANU rule had also a pre-calculated symbolic function, namely to enhance the country's international prestige: Prime Minister Stamboliiski and his young female devotee presented

are consulted, Stamboliiski emerges as a political figure with a more pronounced interest towards the family than has been recognized by historians so far. Thus Nikola Mushanov, leader of the Democratic Party, national deputy and prime minister (October 1931–May 1934), complained that in 1909, Stamboliiski had managed to include in the People's Education Law a "ridiculous" article which imposed a bachelor's tax on single males. The National Assembly had voted for it without further debates, and the disgruntled Mushanov had to repeal it in the next parliamentary session. Indeed, according to the People's Education Law of 5 March 1909, all single males above the age of thirty were subjected to a 10-lev tax per annum, which was to be redirected to the newly-established school fund. Similarly, the parliamentary debates on the 1929 Law for People's Health refer to a right of "referendum" granted by the BANU to the population (including women), according to which pubs could be temporarily closed down upon local demand in order to restore proper communal order. The provisions for a "referendum," it was said, had been part of the Excise Law.⁵⁸

In its original form, the 1920 Law for Compulsory Labor Service embraced both men (from the age of twenty) and unmarried women (from the age of sixteen) regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation.⁵⁹ It was

vanquished Bulgaria as a small, peasant-nation country, with a population of hard-working and honest laborers, and with a respect for the equalities of sexes. For further details, see Mari Firkatian, *Diplomats and Dreamers: The Stancioff Family in Bulgarian History* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008), pp. 191–260.

⁵⁸ For further details, see Nikola Mushanov, *Spomeni. Dnevnik* [Memoirs: Diary] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Khristo Botev," p. 1992), p. 7; "Zakon za Narodnoto Prosveshtenie" [Law for People's Education], *Dŭrzhaven Vestnik* [State gazette], No. 49 (5 March 1909) and No. 52 (8 March 1910), pp. 53–54; *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS*, 39 M (7 February 1928), p. 783. See also the recollections of Nadejda Muir (née Stancioff) of Stamboliiski's visit to England during his one-hundred-day diplomatic mission in Europe, 5 October 1920–14 January 1921. Besides insisting on visiting an English prison to compare it with his memories of the Vidin dungeon, Stamboliiskii expressed a special (private) wish to visit a children's party. For further information see Nadejda Muir, *Dimitri Stancioff, Patriot and Cosmopolitan, 1864–1940* (London: John Murray, 1957), p. 229.

For women's failed hopes and expectations to participate in the foreseen referendum, and in general to be granted the vote under the BANU, see the publications of *Zhenski Glas* [Women's voice], the newspaper of the Bulgarian Women's Union, No. 10 (1.02.1921), p. 1; No. 11 (15.02.1921), p. 4; No. 12 (1.03.1921), p. 3. It was not until 1937 that Bulgarian women—however, defined as "mothers in a legal marriage"—were granted the vote in local elections. In 1938, the right to suffrage was further extended for the parliamentary elections to embrace "married, divorced and widowed women," though not "adult single women." For further details, see Krassimira Daskalova, "Bulgarian women in movements, laws, discourses (1840s–1940s)," *Bulgarian Historical Review*, No. 1–2 (1999), pp. 180–196, especially 189f.

⁵⁹ On the BANU's egalitarian attitude to minority ethnic and religious groups, compare what M. Firkatian has termed the "slapdash construction" of the Bulgarian delegation to the Neuilly peace settlements, made up of representatives of the major Bulgarian political parties and members of the various religious groups, i.e., "a delegation that would represent to Europe the newer, friendlier people of Bulgaria." For further details, see Firkatian, *Diplomats and Dreamers*, p. 193.

only due to the intervention of the BANU's political opponents that labor service for women was to a limited extent reduced. Subsequently, Muslim girls were altogether exempted from it (although they could still serve if they desired) and mothers were permitted to accompany their daughters once they enrolled in CLS.⁶⁰ Experts on Bulgarian history have argued that CLS for women had not been conceived for their economic benefit but had been designed almost entirely as a means of education in order to impart skills in household management, fieldwork and useful social skills (cooking, laundering, ironing, fruit and vegetable gardening, and tending silk-worms, bees and vineyards, but also typing, accounting, and telephone and telegraph operation). Courses on personal, public, and family hygiene had also been made part of young women's CLS education in order to turn rural girls in particular into knowledgeable homemakers and proper educators of their children.⁶¹ Reproduction, however, had been identified by Stamboliiski as early as in 1909, alongside a sense of self-preservation and of economic acquisitiveness, as one of the fundamental "instincts" which served as props of the state, the family and private property—the three institutions, which, according to the BANU leader, no society could do without.⁶²

2. The Democratic Alliance and the 1929 Law for People's Health

LEGISLATIVE INTRODUCTION OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE IN BULGARIA

What eventually became the 1928 Bill for People's Health, authored, as acknowledged during the parliamentary discussions, by Dr Kesiakov, then director of the General Directorate of People's Health, and supported by Andrei Liapchev, Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior and Peo-

⁶⁰ Bell, *Peasants in Power*, p. 175.

⁶¹ Aleksandŭr Veleŭ, "Trudovata povinnost na zemedelskoto pravitelstvo" [Compulsory labor conscription of the Agrarian government], *Historical Review*, No. 1 (1974), pp. 8–35, here p. 13; Dermendzhiev, "Trudovata povinnost" [Compulsory labor conscription], pp. 393–394, in Bell, *Peasants in Power*, p. 175.

⁶² Stamboliiski, *Politicheski Partii ili Sŭslovni Organizatsii* [Political parties or estatist organizations] (Sofia, 1909), p. 70 in Bell, *Peasants in Power*, pp. 69–70.

ple's Health,⁶³ was presented to the National Assembly five years after the BANU's Bill, and seemed to share certain features with the former. It followed (at least in outward appearance) the BANU's idea of the decentralization of healthcare and the delegation of healthcare services to the local municipal authorities. It also partially realized the BANU's intention of establishing a Supreme Sanitary Council, whose major functions focused on advising on and discussing health measures for the entire population.⁶⁴ Yet, although incorporating preventive medicine as the foundation of Bulgaria's new healthcare services, the 1929 Law of People's Health lacked the wide-ranging nation-building purpose of its "Orange" precursor. Instead, its preamble underlined the necessity to single out and combat the causes of those general ailments which undermined the population's health and labor capacity and led to their premature ageing or death, thus depriving the country of healthy workers.⁶⁵ Healthy future offspring, contextualized as the country's future welfare and labor force, became a central target of the new Health Bill, and a new institution at the Department of People's Health was foreseen to deal with problems of motherhood, infancy, and childhood (up to the age of fifteen).⁶⁶ Its principal aims were to investigate the conditions influencing the well-being of the mother and her child, to encourage the local authorities to create proper conditions for their welfare, and, with the cooperation of the state, regions, and municipalities, to open child welfare stations where mothers could receive advice on infant and child healthcare.⁶⁷ All pregnant women and young mothers were placed under the protection of the health authorities and, if economically disadvantaged, were entitled to free counseling and medical care. If they were left without income and support of kin, it became the municipality's duty to provide for their well-being, provided they had been following the doc-

⁶³ See the speech of P. Paliev, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS*, 43 M (21 January 1928), p. 775; speech of N. Püddarev, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS*, 38 M (3 February 1928), p. 671; speech of G. Petrov, *Minutes of the XXII ONA, I RS*, 43 M (21 February 1928), p. 772; speech of T. Konstantinov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS*, 46 M (24 February 1929), p. 850.

⁶⁴ "Motivi kŭm Proektotzakona za Narodnoto Zdrave" [Preamble to the bill for people's health], *Prilozhenie kŭm stenografskite dnevnitsi na XXth ONS, II RS*, [Appendix to the minutes of the XXth ONA, II RS], I (1928/1929), pp. 170–171, here p. 170.

⁶⁵ "Preamble to the Bill for People's Health" (1928/29), *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶⁷ Article 53 in Section VI: "Grizhi za potomstvoto" [Healthcare for future offspring], *Appendix to the Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS* (1927/28), I, p. 69.

tor's instructions. In accordance with the planned decentralization, the 1928 Health Bill emphasized the major responsibilities of the local municipalities to mothers and infants: to secure licensed midwives (and payment for their services, if necessary) and organize childcare provisions, feeding, school hygiene, and recreation at local playgrounds and in mountain and seaside resorts. Employers were required to organize special day-care centers for the babies and infants of their female workers, and to recruit staff to look after them.⁶⁸ However, without further explanatory debates the last provision was scrapped in the final law.⁶⁹

In contrast to the BANU's health ideology, the broad preventive activities outlined by the 1928 Health Bill were not placed within the framework of a far-reaching, future-oriented social program for revitalizing and modernizing the nation, but rather became an end in themselves. While instituting a mother-and child section at the Department of People's Health, the Bill heavily focused on punitive eugenic measures to be undertaken against possible factors leading to the qualitative and quantitative degeneration of the race and thus impairing the state's material and spiritual power. It deplored that Bulgarian conditions would not permit the introduction of proper hygiene control on marriage, and hence it replaced the "Orange" provisions for compulsory premarital certificates with the establishment of an institution of voluntary premarital counseling services to provide information and advice on marital issues to all marriage candidates. Rigid measures against persons suffering from mental and psychological disorders (epilepsy) and from contagious diseases (venereal diseases and acute forms of tuberculosis), became the final objective, thus hoping to prevent hereditary damage to offspring. A later remark, added to the Bill and published in the Appendix of the Minutes of the XXIInd ONA, placed a ban on the marriages of epileptics, the mentally deranged, and those suffering from venereal diseases.⁷⁰ While earlier regulations had outlawed the practice of abortion by midwives,⁷¹ under the 1928 Health Bill this was turned into a criminal act for all qualified medical staff, for the non-qualified and for women undergoing abortion alike. The penalties ranged from fines to

⁶⁸ Articles 54, 56, 57, 60 in Section VI: "Healthcare for future offspring," *ibid.*

⁶⁹ See *State Gazette*, No. 227 (9 March 1929).

⁷⁰ See remark to article 55 in Section VI, p. 69.

⁷¹ Golesmanoff, *The Public Health Services of Bulgaria*, p. 19.

loss of professional rights and incarceration from five to ten years for doctors and medical assistants to from six months to one year for aborting women. Similarly, any pro-abortion propaganda or contraceptive advice was to be legally penalized by severe fines and a three-year imprisonment. The final aim of these measures was to uproot “a social evil,” which, according to Liapchev, had penetrated “even” the rural countryside.⁷²

THE 1929 LAW FOR PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND ITS HISTORICAL LEGACY

The measures in the new Health Bill, presented to the attention of the media in 1927 and to the National Assembly in 1928, provoked much critical response. As stated during the parliamentary discussions, its preparations had started in 1925, and in 1927 an informal copy of one of its versions had been distributed among the national deputies and the members of the Supreme Medical Council.⁷³ The period for public discussion, however, was felt to be insufficient. During the parliamentary debates, questions were raised why, contrary to the law, the expert opinion of the Medical Council had been ignored for so long, and what motives had instigated the changes introduced in the final draft of 1928. It was noted that the latter differed substantially from the earlier circulated version and some of the new provisions even contradicted it.⁷⁴ Parliamentary disputes continued for a year—from January 1928 to February 1929—when the Bill was eventually voted through at its third hearing and became law.

Remarks on the new Health Bill and on its applicability and likely effectiveness in Bulgaria had appeared in the media as early as March 1927. The criticisms in the *Solicitors' Review* could be called tactful, given that it explicitly refrained from comments on the “important arrangements” regarding hygiene, health education and propaganda, care for the future offspring, and measures against alcohol and venereal disease. Significantly, however, its assessment was that the provisions of this “great enterprise” fell into a sphere of “plain wishful thinking for many years to come.”⁷⁵

⁷² “Preamble to the Bill for People's Health,” (1928/1929), p. 171.

⁷³ Speech of G. Petrov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS*, 43 M (21 February 1928), p. 772.

⁷⁴ A copy of the 1927 draft of the Health Bill has not been located so far.

⁷⁵ *Advokatsi Pregled* [Solicitors' review], No. 13 (1 March 1927), pp. 146–148.

Indeed, the history of the 1929 Health Law in Bulgaria, its provisions and the debates over its efficiency can only be understood in the framework of the history of the activities of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) in Bulgaria. As revealed below, the codified Bulgarian health arrangements in 1929 proved to be a translation of the health welfare provisions in New York State—the state where the first Bulgarian scholars on a Rockefeller grant had been trained in public hygiene.

According to the historian Aleksandŭr Velichkov, it had been first the BANU government, confronted by the disastrous socio-economic consequences of the wars and political destabilization, which in 1919–1920 initiated contacts with the RF.⁷⁶ High expectations had been held about the RF's traditional involvement in such fields as medicine, hygiene, and agronomy—vital for agricultural Bulgaria, which had neither expertise, capacities, nor resources to overcome her backwardness or make good her losses in war. Hopes had also been cherished that a financial commitment on the part of the RF to assist Bulgaria with laboratory equipment, scientific literature, and international scholarly exchange would relieve the state of its welfare duties towards the population.⁷⁷ The negotiations had been carried out between the Bulgarian government and the Foundation's International Health Board (IHB) in Paris and its International Education Board (IEB) in Geneva, and the agreements reached had been in full concord with the activities of other American philanthropic organizations active in the Balkans, such as the Near East Relief⁷⁸ and the American Red Cross. An enthusiastic outline of a plan for cooperation had been sent by Velichko Georgiev,

⁷⁶ Aleksandŭr Velichkov, *Amerikanskata Blagotvoritelnost v Bŭlgariia mezhdŭ Dvete Svetovni Voini* [American charity organizations in Bulgaria in the interwar period] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 1994), pp. 70–133, here p. 70. Velichkov's research on the activities of the RF in Bulgaria is based on Bulgarian archival sources, the Rockefeller Foundation Archives in New York, and on articles in contemporary American and Bulgarian mass media. The contributions of the RF to Bulgaria's healthcare have been acknowledged in *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, V, (1986), p. 813. A useful overview of the RF's activities in the international perspective is provided by John Farley, "The International Health Division of the Rockefeller Foundation: The Russell years, 1920–1934," in Paul Weindling (ed.), *International Health Organisations and Movements, 1918–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 203–221.

⁷⁷ Velichkov, *American Charity Organizations in Bulgaria*, pp. 70–71.

⁷⁸ The Near East Relief was the biggest American charity organization working in the Middle East in the interwar period. It had its roots in the first large-scale refugee crisis of the twentieth century, when as a result of the violent upheavals in the Ottoman Empire in 1915, Armenians, Greeks, and other minorities in the Near East were forced from their homes and were dying from hunger, disease, and exposure. However, afterwards it continued to raise funds to feed, clothe, house, and care for the refugees living in camps in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, the Caucasus, and Persia. In 1929/30 the Near East Relief saw an opportunity to move beyond

director of People's Health, to the RF's IHB, including a fully-developed program for educational exchange of young Bulgarians to the United States and Europe, as well as a plan for building an Institute for Epidemiology in the Bulgarian capital and creating a Health Center, which would serve as a role model for the establishment of hygiene units around the country.

Upon his arrival in Sofia on 26 February 1923, Selskar M. Gunn, Vice-President of the RF, was met by both Prime Minister Stamboliiski and King Boris, who had also emphasized the political relevance of the RF's contributions to alleviate the social upheaval in Bulgaria provoked by the consequences of the reparation burden.⁷⁹ In response, in his report to the RF Gunn had described Stamboliiski's cabinet as trustworthy, with no secret revisionist intentions towards the neighboring countries and truly deserving of reparation relief. The BANU seemed honestly committed to promoting preventive medicine among the population, and given the deplorable state of Bulgaria's healthcare, Gunn had suggested approving the country's application for cooperation. Initially, four scholarships were set up to bring young Bulgarian doctors to specialize in sanitary administration, statistics, and malaria and social diseases. Two years later, in 1925, training was extended to include the areas of child mortality, health propaganda, and school hygiene.⁸⁰ The subsequent visit of Dr Frederick Russell, director of the IHB, to Bulgaria at the end of 1923, had sealed the agreement.⁸¹

provision of relief services and, renamed the Near East Foundation (NEF), it initiated a novel (at the time) program of teaching rural people the skills required to permanently improve their lives. Motivated by the guiding principles of "Helping People to Help Themselves," NEF specialists in agriculture and health began to work with farming communities in Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, and Syria/Lebanon to introduce new crops and agricultural practices, provide clean water, better sanitation, and malaria control, and to help people learn to read and write. Following the invitation of the Bulgarian Union for Child Protection (supported by the Ministry of the Interior and of People's Health), the Near East Relief included Bulgaria in their field of activities. The latter also encompassed child welfare and summer recreational programs. For further details on the history of the Near East Relief, see <http://www.neareast.org/main/85-Year-Report/index.html>; last accessed 28 March 2009.

For further details on the activities of American organizations in Bulgaria, see Velichkov, *American Charity Organizations in Bulgaria*, pp. 70–133; Milena Angelova, "Rokfelerovata fondatsiia i amerikanskata blizkoiztochna fondatsiia v Bulgariia—initsiatiivi v poletu na sotsialnata rabota, 20–30-te godini na XX vek" [The Rockefeller Foundation and the American Near East Foundation in Bulgaria—initiatives in the field of social work in the 1920s and 1930s], in Kristina Popova and Milena Angelova (eds.), *Obshtestveno Podpomagane i Sotsialnata Rabota v Bulgariia. Istoriia, Institutsii, Ideologii, Imena*. [Public assistance and social work in Bulgaria. History, institutions, ideologies, names] (Blagoevgrad: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Neofit Rilski," 2005), pp. 112–125.

⁷⁹ Velichkov, *American Charity Organizations in Bulgaria*, p. 73.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 77.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 74–73.

The 9 June 1923 coup and Stamboliiski's assassination thereafter do not seem to have had an impact on the RF's final decision.

In the next decade cooperation between the RF and the Bulgarian authorities increased, and Bulgarian doctors were given the opportunity to specialize in social hygiene and preventive medicine in the United States and in Europe (Italy, Germany, England).⁸² The subsequent reduction in the number of grants reflected rather the increasing international tension, which left its imprint on the activities of the RF in Europe, in general, and Bulgaria, in particular. As pointed out by Velichkov, and proved by archival documents, Bulgarian officials persistently manifested their goodwill to the RF up to the very break-up between the Bulgarian state and the RF in 1939. Those who had received their training on a Rockefeller grant continued playing a vital role in the shaping of Bulgarian legislation on family policies up to the communist takeover in September 1944.

“THE WAY THEY SAW IT”:

THE PROBLEM OF “WISHFUL” SOCIAL HYGIENE

In the preamble to the 1929 Health Law, Liapchev emphasized that the new law would establish Bulgaria's healthcare on the foundations of preventive medicine, “as much as this is applicable in our conditions.”⁸³ In fact, the term “wishful thinking” was to become a common description of the envisaged arrangements. During the parliamentary disputes, the proposed measures came to be perceived as part of a broader social policy which exceeded the legal framework and the capacities of the Health Bill and ambitiously (and hence, futilely) attempted to regulate the country's entire social and economic life. The Bill was defined as an “agglomerate” (a description provided by the Radical, N. Andreev),⁸⁴ i.e., an enormous bulk of measures compiled and copied from the United States under the influence of the activities of the Rockefeller Foundation in Bulgaria and of the Bulgarian officials who had studied on a Rockefeller grant in the States.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid., pp. 78–79.

⁸³ “Motivi kŭm proektotzakona za narodnoto zdrave” [Preamble to the Bill for People's Health], *Prilozhenie kŭm Stenografskite Dnevniitsi na XX ONS* [Appendix to the minutes of the XXth ONA], II RS, 1928/1929, I, p. 170.

⁸⁴ Speech of N. Andreev, *Minutes of the XXII ONA*, I RS, 39 M (7 February 1928), p. 688.

⁸⁵ Speech of R. Madzharov, Democratic Alliance, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA* I RS, 39 M (7 February 1928), p. 676; Speech of Petko Stainov, Democratic Alliance, *ibid.*, pp. 682–685.

Dr Kesiakov, the current director of people's health, was mentioned to be among the latter, while the monograph *A Model Organization for Preventive Public Health in New York, America*, published by Dr Nikola Koichev, physician and statistician at the Directorate of People's Health and graduate from Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health,⁸⁶ was pointed to for comparative purposes.⁸⁷

The monograph, however, as detailed as it was, made no mention of the United States Children's Bureau (1912), which was the first serious American attempt to engage in systematic analysis of the state of maternal health and high infant mortality. Nor did it refer to the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921, legally authorizing federal aid to states for maternity, child health, and welfare programs. The latter eventually lapsed under the pressure of the American Medical Association in 1929, but Koichev's work was written two years earlier, in 1927, and presumably the well-read author had been selectively aware of these initiatives.⁸⁸ Interestingly, Dr Rusi Radkov,⁸⁹ the

Professor Petko Stainov (1890–1972): Minister of Railways (1930–1931), Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cults (9 Sept. 1944–31 March 1946), member of the National Council of the Fatherland Front (1949). Long-term national deputy, he opposed Bulgaria's involvement in the war against the Allies (1941) and petitioned for Bulgaria's reorientation toward the Soviet Union (August 1944). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 415–416.

For a history of the activities of the Rockefeller Foundation in Bulgaria, see chapter II in Velichkov, *American Charity Organizations in Bulgaria*, pp. 70–133. For an account of the courses passed by Bulgarians on a Rockefeller grant in the States, see Rusi Radkov's reports in F. 372, op. 1, a.e. 582, ll. 1–7. Radkov himself had taken courses in public health administration, personal hygiene, and specialist work in tuberculosis.

⁸⁶ Nikola G. Koichev, *Obraztsova Organizatsiia za Opazvane Obshtestvenoto Zdrave v Niu Iork, Amerika* [A model organization for preventive public healthcare in New York, America] (Sofia: Dürzhavna Pechantnitsa, 1927). Indeed, Dr Koichev's monograph had been published as an attachment to the Bulletin of the Directorate of People's Health (*Biuletin na Direktsiata na Narodnoto Zdrave*). In his "Preface," Koichev mentioned that he had been among the first four Bulgarian candidates selected by the Supreme Medical Council to specialize at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health in 1924 on a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. The grants had been administered by Dr Gunn, the representative of the Rockefeller Foundation for Europe, and were awarded on condition that they would be utilized for the study of new methods of preventive medicine and social hygiene. The candidates were expected to return to Bulgaria and devote their professional efforts to the implementation of the newly acquired knowledge in the Bulgarian environment. For further details, see Koichev, "Predgovor" [Preface], in *A Model Organization for Preventive Public Healthcare*, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Speech of G. Petrov, National Liberal, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS*, 43 M (21 February 1928), p. 773.

⁸⁸ For further details on the Sheppard-Towner Act and the development of American maternal healthcare in the pre-Second World War period, see Sue Tolleson-Rinehart, "Maternal healthcare policy: Britain and the United States," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (January 1987), pp. 193–211, esp. 193–198. For a contemporary's view on the Sheppard-Towner Act, see Austin F. Macdonald, "Recent trends in federal aid to the states," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (August 1931), pp. 628–634.

⁸⁹ For further details on Dr Rusi Radkov, see *Entsiklopediia Bŭlgariia* [Encyclopedia Bulgaria] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1986), V, pp. 653–654.

then inspector-in-chief of tuberculosis and child mortality at the Directorate of People's Health and a graduate of Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, had recommended grouping the issues of child healthcare and tuberculosis under a separate law, preferably for social diseases. The Directorate, however, declined to follow his suggestion.⁹⁰

Bulgarian legislators from the ruling coalition of the Democratic Alliance and from the opposition alike acknowledged the values of the New York State healthcare system, based on the principles of social hygiene, and praised the merits of preventive medicine for the well-being of society. Nonetheless, they also realistically cast doubt on whether it would have positive effects if transplanted to their own country. While the future clearly belonged to preventive medicine, its implementation in practice required an already well-developed medical system, well-organized and adequately equipped and sponsored hospitals, and sufficient trained medical personnel. Preventive medicine could flourish in a society as prosperous as America's, organized along the principles of social solidarity, where the humane initiatives of the state were supported by generous charity organizations. In contrast, in Bulgaria even the Aleksandrov Hospital, the state's central medical institution, suffered from the severe consequences of limited revenues.⁹¹

According to the well-grounded arguments of G. Petrov, a lawyer and representative of the National Liberals, the principle of decentralization, which in Liapchev's words represented the essence of progress, and hence of preventive medicine,⁹² would lead to the state discharging itself from its current obligations to provide for the medical treatment of its population. By delegating these duties to the competence of the already financially overburdened and exhausted local and regional authorities, it was feared that decentralization, rather than strengthening the nation's health, was fated to bolster general morbidity and increase the mortality rates. The Bill's provisions clearly ran counter to its promulgated humanitarian motives.⁹³

⁹⁰ F. 372, op. 1, a.e.1314, l. 111.

⁹¹ Speech of P. Stainov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS*, 39 M (7 February 1928), p. 683; Speech of G. Petrov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS*, 43 M (21 February 1928), p. 774; Speech of K. Lulchev, Social Democrat, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS*, 44 M (22 Jan. 1928), p. 801.

⁹² Speech of A. Liapchev, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS*, 43 M (21 February 1923), p. 779.

⁹³ Speech of G. Petrov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS*, 43 M (21 February 1928), pp. 772–773.

So far, the current health law had not differentiated between municipal and state commitment in the field of public healthcare, and the state had borne all the responsibilities for the organization and support of health institutions in the country, as well as for the provision of free medical treatment for the needy in state, regional and municipal hospitals. While this practice might have been rejected in culturally advanced countries on the ground of stifling the self-initiative and enthusiasm of local elected structures, its implementation in Bulgaria would lead to quite the opposite and undesired consequences.⁹⁴ The financially drained Bulgarian municipalities had no resources to organize and finance the healthcare of their sick, to exempt their poor from payment for services and to support their medical personnel. The envisaged subsidies would have to be collected from unutilized (and in Petrov's view, non-existent) revenues from previous budget years, from donations and bequests ("as if abundant in our country") and from fines. It was "cruel," Petrov insisted, to turn people's ignorance of preventative measures into the main source of money-saving, and to allow the state to withdraw from its current duties in order to concentrate solely on issues of preventive hygiene propaganda.⁹⁵ The impoverished status of both citizens and local administrative structures in Bulgaria made centralization rather than decentralization the most appropriate approach to the nation's health. The state was in a position to take equal responsibility for the implementation of preventive policy and medical treatment and to continue covering the expenses of all health institutions. This would relieve the municipalities and allow them to concentrate on pursuing other vital goals of modernization, such as electrification and irrigation, advances which would significantly improve people's welfare and lives.⁹⁶

Other problematic issues inconsistent with Bulgarian practice were the creation of a cumbersome bureaucratic machine composed of numerous councils (*süvetism*) and with overblown staff, whose functions would overlap and hence breed negligence and irresponsibility rather than efficiency.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 773, 775–776; see also the speech of K. Tomov, BANU, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS, 44 M* (22 February 1928), p. 796–797, where Tomov accused the drafters of the Bill of serving the interests of the medical profession at the expense of the rural population and the poor.

⁹⁶ Speech of G. Petrov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS, 43 M* (21 February 1928), p. 776.

⁹⁷ Speech of N. Türkalanov, Democratic Alliance, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS, 43 M* (21 February 1928), p. 765; Speech of G. Petrov, *ibid.*, p. 773.

In addition, if enacted in the Bulgarian context the Bill's provisions would concentrate unprecedented power in the hands of the minister of the interior and the director of people's health. The introduction of a supreme sanitary council on the New York model would eliminate the functions of the existing medical council and would subject the latter to the director's decisions rather than only to his supervision. The minister of the interior, too, would be increasing his power, transforming his supervision into management of the activities of the Directorate and hence extending his power over the entire organization of healthcare in the country. Yet due to his dual responsibilities as minister of the interior (and hence, of the police) and people's health, Petrov feared that this power could have long-term implications for the country's future healthcare.⁹⁸ An alarming centralization of the bureaucratic machinery was in progress, while simultaneously the state was withdrawing from its traditional responsibilities toward its citizens and to local administrative structures.⁹⁹

CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Interestingly, although the deputies seemed to reveal a good knowledge of the New York State healthcare system and were acquainted with Koichev's monograph, none of them referred explicitly to his second work, *Child Welfare: The Fight Against Child Mortality*,¹⁰⁰ published in 1927, i.e., shortly before the parliamentary hearings, and clearly related to the preparation of the new Health Bill. Some of the information on child mortality cited during the parliamentary debates might, however, have originated from it.

In its first part, Koichev's monograph presented a concise outline of the statistics of child mortality in Bulgaria, spanning the period from the turn of the twentieth century up to 1925. It included brief information on national and regional child mortality rates and on its rural-urban distribution, a comparison of Bulgaria's records with international data,

⁹⁸ Speech of G. Petrov, *ibid.*, p. 773.

⁹⁹ Speech of P. Stainov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS*, 39 M (7 Feb. 1928), p. 682; Speech of N. Andreev, *ibid.*, pp. 688–689, 692; Speech of G. Petrov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS*, 43 M (21 Feb. 1928), p. 774; Ts. Stoianchev, BANU–Vrabcha-1, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS*, 40 M (8 Feb. 1928), p. 706.

¹⁰⁰ Nikola Koichev, *Obshtestveni Grizhi za Deteto. Borba s Detskata Smŭrtnost* [Child welfare: The fight against child mortality] (Sofia: Petchatnitsa "Rodopi," 1927).

and a breakdown of Bulgarian figures by age. According to the presented data, the index of child mortality had fluctuated between 143 and 150.9 per thousand (in 1910 and 1925, respectively), peaking in 1908, 1909, and 1923 (168.7, 170.1, and 166.1 per thousand) and recording its lowest value in 1919 (109.6 per thousand).¹⁰¹ In contrast to the average Bulgarian child mortality rate of 146.8 per thousand in 1924, the rates for Denmark, England and France were twice as low (85, 75 and 85 per thousand, respectively), and those of Austria, Holland, and Sweden three times lower (57, 51, and 57 per thousand, respectively). While child mortality in the advanced countries was in decline, no decrease was observed in Bulgaria.¹⁰² Child mortality in the urban areas was even higher than in the countryside (159 versus 143 per thousand, respectively).¹⁰³ Most deaths among the population occurred in the age-group of 0–1 (27.2 per cent), followed by the age-group of 1–5 (11.7 per cent) and rapidly declining thereafter (5.2 per cent in the age-group of 5–10, and 3.1 per cent in the age-group of 10–15).¹⁰⁴ Most infants died within their first three months—56.5 per cent in the towns and 56.7 per cent in the rural areas, in contrast to 16.7 (urban) and 17.8 (rural) per cent between their third and sixth month.¹⁰⁵ In summer their deaths were mostly attributed to diarrhea, implying inadequate feeding on the part of the mother, while in winter pneumonia and influenza were the main causes of the high death tolls.¹⁰⁶ A Bulgarian child had a life expectancy at birth of forty years, whereas in a culturally advanced country, its life-span would have been longer by ten years.¹⁰⁷

Koichev had illustrated the tragedy of the Bulgarian mother and her child with pictures of maternal despair by Käthe Kollwitz, the noted German artist and sculptor well known for her socialist ideas.¹⁰⁸ They gave emotional backing to the appeal to adopt the measures necessary to com-

¹⁰¹ Koichev, *Child Welfare*, p. 20.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁸ Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), German graphic artist and sculptor, first female director of graphic arts at the Berlin Academy (1932). The advent of fascism in Germany ended her career there. Without being a communist herself, Kollwitz was well known for her left-wing ideas, and her work referring to motherhood or children was suggestive of the life of the proletariat and of death as a force amongst the poor. The 1920s–1930s

bat child mortality rates. Koichev had pointed out that such arrangements had already been enacted in most countries which had been participants in the Great War, aiming at preserving and reviving the life of the population. Germany, Austria, and the USA had been pioneers in this field.¹⁰⁹

The measures outlined in Koichev's monograph included regular and free prenatal examinations in prenatal clinics, to be organized by the state, the municipality, or by private charities; the presence of a midwife and a doctor (if needed) at delivery; the establishment of child welfare stations managed by a doctor and a qualified public health nurse and of foundling homes for healthy abandoned infants, likewise to be run by the state, the municipalities, or charities. Legitimate and illegitimate infants were to be given the same facilities and care—this was expected to awaken the deeper maternal feelings of the unwed mother and prevent her from abandoning the child.¹¹⁰ Special emphasis was placed on child welfare stations, where mothers could receive proper advice and literature on child rearing. Doctors were expected to apply for support on behalf of poor mothers to the corresponding municipalities, private charities, or the state, while public health nurses were required to pay regular visits to young mothers, to encourage them to follow the doctor's instructions, and to inspect the child's environment.¹¹¹ The only effective means to fight abortion, according to Koichev's synopsis, was securing proper living conditions for the population, as well as restoring women's individual freedom over their bodies. Youth secure in their circumstances would enter matrimony early, which would ensure healthy offspring while also restricting prostitution and the circulation of venereal disease. An anti-abortion law would permit abortions in special cases, thus lessening the number of secret interventions and sparing the health and life of the woman undergoing abortion.¹¹²

are considered her most powerful period, when her work assumed a propaganda quality and poignantly addressed issues such as post-war misery, unjust abortion laws and their effect on working-class women. Kollwitz worked with the Women's International League for Peace. For further information, see Lucy R. Lippard, "Foreword," in Renate Hinz (ed.), *Kollwitz, Käthe: Graphic, Posters, Drawings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), pp. vi–xi.

¹⁰⁹ Koichev, *Child Welfare*, p. 40.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–53.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

With the exception of the aforementioned provisions for illegitimate offspring, all other arrangements found their reflections in Section VI, articles 53, 54, and 58 of the new Health Bill, and were to become law.

Yet, the parliamentary debates reveal that child welfare, defined in terms of child care institutions, natal care, and anti-abortion regulations, received little (if any) attention from the deputies. The inapplicability of the American healthcare system (as understood by the legislators)¹¹³ in Bulgaria as well as its possible pitfalls on local ground, continued to dominate the parliamentary discussions, along with flippant observations on the envisaged eugenic measures to fight alcoholism, syphilis, and abortion. In contrast to the Bill's lofty intentions to eliminate contagious and social diseases and thus reduce mortality, boost the nation's forces, and bolster its creative spirit, the legislators exhibited firm pragmatism in their approach to the restrictive arrangements on alcohol and to the introduction of premarital counseling clinics in Bulgaria. Whereas none of the deputies was in favor of heavy drinking,¹¹⁴ they did not support a total ban on alcohol, either, as its production was related to the traditional economy of the country.¹¹⁵ No objections were raised against premarital counseling, as opposed to compulsory premedical examinations—a provision which allegedly had been part of the preliminary 1927 draft and had excited the deputies' protest. However, the projected child welfare stations, as well as the guaranteed and accessible services of doctors and public health nurses, were portrayed as a mere "daydream."¹¹⁶

The incidental remarks on the arrangements envisaged for midwifery provide an interesting insight of the real extent to which the legislators were involved in the issue of child healthcare issues.

As a matter of fact, all deputies, regardless of their political affiliation, acknowledged the fight against rocketing infant and child mortality as a major responsibility. Representatives of the ruling Democratic Alliance, of

¹¹³ From the perspective of history, the parliamentary debates do not indicate whether the 1928 Bulgarian Bill for People's Health, and hence ultimately the 1929 Law, was drawn-up in accord with the New York healthcare system or whether it was modeled after the RF's vision of healthcare. Further research is needed to identify the source for the numerous health bills since 1925, as well as their native, "Bulgarian" modifications.

¹¹⁴ Speech of N. Püdarev, Democratic Alliance, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS, 38 M* (3 Feb. 1928), p. 669.

¹¹⁵ Speech of G. Petrov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS, 43 M* (21 Feb. 1928), p. 772.

¹¹⁶ Speech of K. Tomov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS, 44 M* (22 January 1928), p. 795.

the BANU, and of the Workers' Party in opposition alike, emphasized that modern principles of preventive medicine in the culturally advanced countries had reduced child mortality well below the levels still prevailing in Bulgaria.¹¹⁷ Yet, it was only the representatives of the left that expressed true concern about the Bill's regulations regarding natal care and the health of Bulgaria's future offspring. K. Tomov, representative of the BANU, underscored that, once again, the provisions were mostly the product of wishful thinking and far from the reality of Bulgarian women's lives.¹¹⁸ It was a public secret that peasant women would continue their work in the field up to the very last day or hour of the delivery. Although the health and strength, the quantitative and qualitative nature of the nation depended on their well-being, Bulgarian women were left to give birth in "horrendous" unhygienic conditions, without medical care, and in the presence of officially unqualified midwives, *babi*, whose incompetent intervention commonly brought infection to both mother and child.¹¹⁹ Bulgaria's population growth hardly correlated with the physical strength of the nation, as the high birth rates were accompanied with exceptionally high infant mortality rates. In Tomov's words, Bulgarian peasant women had been turned into machines of child mass production;¹²⁰ yet, out of their eight, ten, and even fourteen children, only two or three eventually survived. So far, neglected natal and post-natal care had pushed Bulgaria's offspring into the elementary state of survival of the fittest, where the term "environmental conditions" disguised misery. The introduction of licensed midwives to practice in the countryside was truly required; yet, in this regard, the new health provisions reduced rather than increased the number of professional midwives in the country. Whereas the 1903 Law currently in force foresaw a midwife

¹¹⁷ Speech of N. Püderev, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA*, I RS, 38 M (3 February 1928), p. 669; Speech of N. Türkalanov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA*, I RS, 43 M (21 February 1928), pp. 764–765; Speech of Kh. Kalaidzhiev, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA*, I RS, 40 M (8 Feb. 1928), p. 701; Speech of Ts. Stoianchev, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA*, I RS, 40 M (8 Feb. 1928), p. 711.

¹¹⁸ Interestingly, the historian Grüncharov maintained that BANU–Oranzhev, which Tomov belonged to, was perceived by its contemporaries as the ultra-right faction (*po-desen i ot nai-desnite*) of the Agrarians, advocating cooperation with the bourgeois parties and refusing any teamwork with the Social Democrats and the Communists. The above-mentioned debate, however, challenges such conclusions. For further details, see Statelova and Grüncharov, *A History of Modern Bulgaria, 1878–1944*, p. 443.

¹¹⁹ Speech of K. Tomov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA*, I RS, 44 M (22 January 1928), p. 795.

¹²⁰ See Koichev's reference to mothers whose frequent pregnancies would turn them into "child factories" (*fabriki za detsa*), in *Child Welfare*, p. 17.

in places with a population of four thousand, the new regulations raised the population requirement to five thousand. Tomov appealed to the legislators to make a concession and keep the old arrangements. A midwife, he underlined, was the first support for each new-born Bulgarian citizen.¹²¹

He was joined in his concerns by N. Andreev, of the Workers' Party, and Kosta Lulchev, a Social Democrat. Andreev called the 1928 arrangements a "regress"¹²² and, jointly with Lulchev, attacked those provisions of Article 200 which, given the shortage of professional midwives, would return natal care to the "expertise" of the same old *babi*.¹²³ However, the concerns of the left were brushed off as irrelevant by the ruling Democratic Alliance: S. Savov joked that none of his twelve children had been born with the assistance of a doctor or a midwife, and *babi* served their purpose well.¹²⁴ It was noteworthy, however, that the initial version of the Bill's section on child healthcare, as had been presented to the attention of the Directorate by Rusi Radkov in November 1926, had categorically ruled *babi* out as a substitute for midwives.¹²⁵ Eventually, Prime Minister Liapchev admitted that earlier provisions had envisaged a midwife in places with a population of over four thousand; yet, he failed to provide any clarification for the subsequent change.¹²⁶ Without further debate the final vote of the Bill in February 1929 enacted the disputed provisions into law.

Although the deputies' comments revealed their deeply-rooted traditionalism on gender issues, the reversal of the arrangements in regard to midwifery was probably not intentional but has to be contextualized within the framework of a rather literal translation of American administrative structures to the new Bulgarian health system: according to the administrative division of New York State, places with a population of less than six thousand, were classified as villages or small towns.¹²⁷ If one scrutinizes the archival files of the General Directorate of People's Health, it seems that Rusi Radkov had anticipated the evolving problem and had intentionally

¹²¹ Speech of K. Tomov, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS, 44 M* (22 January 1928), pp. 795, 799.

¹²² Speech of N. Andreev, Workers' Party, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS, 39 M* (7 February 1928), p. 692.

¹²³ Speech of N. Andreev, *Ibid.*, p. 692; Speech of K. Lulchev, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS, 44 M* (22 February 1928), p. 807.

¹²⁴ Speech of S. Savov, National Alliance, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS, 44 M* (22 February 1928), p. 807.

¹²⁵ F, 372, op. 1, a.e. 1314, l. 112.

¹²⁶ Speech of A. Liapchev, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, I RS, 44 M* (22 February 1928), p. 795.

¹²⁷ Koichev, *A Model Organisation*, p. 9.

left the number of population entitled to a licensed midwife unspecified in his report.¹²⁸

In fact, the parliamentary debates in the period of 1928–1929 reveal that, despite the lofty rhetoric accompanying the new Health Bill, the issues of childcare, maternal policy, population numbers and quality of the future offspring provoked little interest among the deputies. In a slip of candor, Liapchev himself remarked that combined with the high fertility of the population, the much-criticized infant mortality rates of Bulgaria had nevertheless propelled the country to the top of Europe's vital statistics.¹²⁹ In the words of the Austrian anthropologist Christian Promitzer, not only Western models, but also empty state coffers as a consequence of the reparation burdens and of the World Economic Crisis had dictated a course which inevitably involved the reduction of expenditure on hospitals and partly on medical personnel, too.¹³⁰

3. Fertility decrease and the rediscovery of state welfare

THE FAILURE OF THE PROPAGANDA APPROACH

Following the regulations of the 1929 Law, the Directorate of People's Health focused its attention on disseminating instructions on hygiene and health amongst the population. According to a post-1929 report of Rusi Radkov, the Directorate engaged in publishing articles in newspapers and circulated fliers to popularize the functions of the new health structures, printed and put up child health posters, as well as arranged exhibitions in the office windows of the Sofia Health Center, which, in Radkov's words, "attracted much attention."¹³¹ In doing so, the Directorate was assisted by "some local authorities and private organizations" involved in maternal

¹²⁸ F. 372, op. 1, a.e. 1314, l. 112.

¹²⁹ Speech of A. Liapchev, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IRS, 40 M* (8 February 1928), p. 711.

¹³⁰ Christian Promitzer, "Von der Kriegsepidemie zum ethnisch-religiösen Stigma: Flecktyphus und Entlausungskampagnen in Bulgarien (1912–1944)" [From war epidemic to ethnic-religious stigma: Typhus and delousing campaigns in Bulgaria (1912–1914)], in *Virus. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin*, No. 7 (2008), pp. 131–145.

¹³¹ F. 372, op. 1, a.e. 1314, l. 21.

and child healthcare, by the Bulgarian Red Cross, which had organized ten child welfare stations (eight of which, however, were in Sofia), as well as by the Bulgarian Union for Child Protection. The latter was acknowledged to be “one of the most active private organizations regarding maternity and child welfare.”¹³² Yet, the results proved far from encouraging, and the pitfalls in the legislation forecast in the 1928 parliamentary debates were soon to become clear.

In 1936, seven years after the launch of preventive medicine in Bulgaria, Dr Zakhari Bochev, Inspector-in-Chief at the Directorate of People's Health (and himself a Rockefeller grant-holder),¹³³ revealed in a diagram in his monograph, *A Unified Health Service: Ideas and Plan for Improving People's Healthcare*, that in 1930, in contrast to 1929, the total mortality rate in Bulgaria had decreased.¹³⁴ The child mortality rates, however, were still exceedingly high. Bochev attributed this phenomenon to the agricultural nature of the population, which, according to him, suffered from both low living standards and ignorance, and lacked any idea of planned and rational reproduction. Echoing the rhetoric of the preamble to the 1929 Health Law, he deplored the waste of young lives, which represented as well a waste for the national economy. His comments, however, were marked by a certain anxiety about the population's numbers.

In a radio presentation on 12 October 1939, reproduced in the journal *Public Assistance*, Dr Slavcho Zagorov, Minister of Trade, Industry, and Labor, announced data on infant mortality reminiscent of Koichev's findings in 1927. According to the current data, Bulgaria were in the same league as Egypt, India, Romania, and Chile. Unattended deliveries were

¹³² Ibid., I. 21.

For a history of the Bulgarian Union for Child Protection, see Kristina Popova, *The National Child* (1999). For a direct link between the Bulgarian Union for Child Protection and politically influential, pro-Bulgarian British pacifists at the League of Nations, see Svetla Baloutzova, “Bowling together for peace and child welfare: activities of the British Save-the-Children Fund in the Balkans,” Paper at the 20th Annual CCBH Summer Conference, *From “Voluntary Action” to “NGOs”: Voluntary Action in Britain since 1900*, 28–30 June 2006, Institute for Historical Research, University of London.

¹³³ Bochev, Zakhari (dates unknown): Inspector-in-Chief at the Directorate of People's Health, in charge of child and school hygiene (1936–unknown); Rockefeller grant-holder (1931, 1932), specializations at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and in Paris, Moscow, Zagreb, and Budapest. The details on Zakhari Bochev are based on personal data provided in his work, *Tsialosta Zdravna Sluzhba. Idei i Plan za Podobrenie na Narodnoto Zdraveopazvane* [A unified health service: Ideas and plan for improving the people's healthcare] (Sofia: Izdanie na Druzhestvoto za Narodno Zdrave i Sotsialna Higiena, 1936).

¹³⁴ Bochev, *A Unified Health Service*, p. 19.

identified as just another factor, along with digestive and respiratory diseases, which contributed to the phenomenon: according to unpublished statistical data, eighty per cent of rural deliveries took place without any medical assistance, in the absence of either doctor or midwife. In Zagorov's view, the remedy was to be found in improving the welfare of the population and raising its cultural awareness. He formulated it as a new challenge to be faced by both the Bulgarian family and the Bulgarian state.¹³⁵

Zagorov's concerns were echoed by Dr Zakhari Zakhariiev, who, in his detailed work, *Why Do Children Die*,¹³⁶ approved and recommended by the Directorate of People's Health in Order No. 15821 of 20 August 1939, singled out improvement of midwifery as a specially important measure to prevent child mortality. Given the uneven distribution of midwives between the rural and urban areas—attributed to their meager income in the rural countryside and to the inability of the impoverished municipalities to guarantee their wages—Zakhariiev advocated the responsibility for midwives' support from the municipalities to the state budget, thus ensuring at least one midwife per local administrative structure. His standpoint was further illustrated by the cartoons of Stoian Venev, a left-wing artist and cartoonist,¹³⁷ meant to criticize popular, unhygienic birth- and child-rearing practices in the country. His cartoons, however, recalled the concerns back in 1928 of G. Petrov, who had predicted that the imported healthcare system would not work properly in an economically straitened Bulgaria.

Yet, since the mid-1930s anxiety about child mortality rates had increasingly been related to concerns about birth decline. Thus the XXIVth Congress of the Doctors' Association, held in December 1937 and vice-chaired by Koichev, also voiced its unease about the prevailing high child mortality rate and referred to it as a serious social "ailment." Primitive living conditions, a poor diet, and popular superstitions were identified as major factors, with

¹³⁵ Slavcho Zagorov, "Detskata smúrtnost (Radio beseda, 12 oktomvri 1939)" [Child mortality (Radio presentation, 12 October 1939)], *Obshtestveno Podpomagane* [Public assistance], No. 8–9 (November 1939), pp. 284–285.

¹³⁶ Zakhari Zakhariiev, *Zashto Umirat Detsata* [Why do children die] (Sofia, 1939).

¹³⁷ Stoian Venev, an artist and cartoonist, contributed actively to left-wing (communist) newspapers such as *Cherven Smiakh* [Red laughter], *Ekho* [Echo], *Zhupel* [Amber], etc., in the pre-1944 period under the pen name of *Proletarche* [Young proletarian]. Venev continued his artistic career in the post-1944 period in Bulgarian popular newspapers such as *Rabotnichesko Delo* [Workers' deeds], the central newspaper of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and in *Stúrsheľ* [Gadfly]. For further details see *Kratka Búlgarska Entsiklopediia* [A concise Bulgarian encyclopedia] (Sofia: BAN, 1963), I, p. 475.

economic destitution and the inadequate medical aid for children topping the list of causes. Nevertheless, child mortality ranked only second on the alarm list of the congress, falling birth rates taking top priority. According to data, the village—the most prolific source of the biological power of the nation—was restricting its fertility. It was taken that this implied the beginning of the socio-biological degeneration of the nation.¹³⁸ Interestingly, in 1935 Koichev, following the invitation of Professor Stoian Vatev, founder and chairman of the Union for Child Protection in Bulgaria (1925),¹³⁹ had given two papers at the Paediatrician Association and the Association for Hygiene and Preventive Medicine which were subsequently published in a separate brochure in 1936. Acknowledging the need to provide a “correct direction of all initiatives in protection of pregnant women and mothers,”¹⁴⁰ Koichev had expressed concern about the declining birth rates in the country, and had pointed to the French and Soviet model of maternal and child healthcare as an workable model for Bulgaria to follow in her health plan.¹⁴¹ The establishment of a special Institute for the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood at the Medical Faculty to research into the biological and social development of the Bulgarian child (reminiscent of the Soviet Institute for the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood)¹⁴² was identified as vital for any further correct initiative in the field of social hygiene for mothers and children. Close cooperation between the Directorate of People’s Health, the Ministry of Education and various private organizations—the Union for Child Protection (the Bulgarian branch of the International Save-the-Children Union) in particular—was advocated as part of a set of useful initiatives.¹⁴³ Yet, contrary to the provisions of the 1929 Health Law, Koichev had underlined the necessity of decisive state intervention to secure the “enormous financial resources” needed to meet the increasing demand of initiatives in the field of maternal and child social policy. The

¹³⁸ “Rezoliutsiia na XXIV redoven süborn na lecarskiia süiuz” [Resolutions of the XXIVth regular congress of the Doctors’ Association], F. 372, op. 1, a.e. 576, 2–11, ll. 5–6.

¹³⁹ For further details on Stoian Vatev, see *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, I, pp. 610–611.

¹⁴⁰ Stoian Vatev, “Predgovor” [Preface], in Nikola Kiochev, *Obshtestveni Grizhi za Deteto (V Chuzhbina i u Nas)* [Child welfare (abroad and in Bulgaria)] (Stara Zagora: Pechanitsa “Svetlina,” 1936), p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Nikola Koichev, *Obshtestveni Grizhi za Deteto (V Chuzhbina i u Nas)* [Child welfare (abroad and in Bulgaria)] (Stara Zagora: Pechatnitsa “Svetlina,” 1936), p. 8.

¹⁴² Koichev, *Child Welfare (Abroad and in Bulgaria)*, pp. 38–39.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

state was identified as the main organizer and provider of child and maternal welfare, whereas private initiatives were reconceptualized as “contributing to this nationally important venture.”¹⁴⁴

THE LEGAL REVERSAL

The first parliamentary appeal to lift the financially restrictive provisions of the new 1929 Health Law was voiced less than two years after it had been passed in the National Assembly. What became the cause of controversy was an order of the Council of Ministers of 23 August 1930, which granted free medical care to pregnant Russian refugees in Bulgarian state hospitals.¹⁴⁵ The order itself was part of several legislative acts passed by Liapchev’s cabinet to ameliorate the living conditions of the extremely destitute Russian refugees in Bulgaria.¹⁴⁶ The latter, besides having been deprived of all their property in the 1917 revolution and the following months of civil war, had also become the first victims of unemployment in the economic crisis in the late 1920s and early 1930s.¹⁴⁷

The preamble to the order stressed its humanitarian purpose, emphasizing the historical closeness between the Russian and the Bulgarian nations and attempting to gain both the sympathy and the respect of the deputies towards the situation of the refugees who had sought shelter in “small and weak, equally suppressed and unfortunate Bulgaria.”¹⁴⁸ Yet, while all deputies

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁴⁵ *Postanovlenie na Ministerskiiia Suvet ot 23 Avgust 1930 za Bezplatno Lechenie v Bolnitsite na Bremenni Ruski Bezhanki* [Order of the Council of Ministers of 23 August 1930 for free medical treatment of pregnant Russian refugees], *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IV RS, 3 M* (13 November 1930), p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ See also the right of free medical treatment granted to Russian veterans from the Russian–Turkish war of liberation, as well as the same right extended to all poor Russian refugees in Bulgaria four months later. For further details, see *State Gazette*, No. 235 (22 January 1931) and No. 38 (20 May 1931).

¹⁴⁷ Doncho Daskalov, *Bialata Emigratsiia v Bulgariia* [The white emigration in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv Kl. Okhridski, 1997), pp. 71–72.

¹⁴⁸ Speech of G. Enchev, BANU–Vrabcha-1, *Minutes of the XXIIInd ONA, IV RS, 3M* (13 November 1930), p. 13. As a result of the Russian socialist revolution in 1917, circa 1,200,000–2,000,000 Russian emigrants left for Europe, Asia, and America. In Bulgaria, their number increased from nearly 5,000 in 1919 to 34,000 in 1922, and then progressively declined to 15,500 in 1937–1938 as a large number of the better educated preferred to migrate to more prosperous countries. Those who stayed were less educated and mostly in temporary employment. Marriages between Russian male emigrants and Bulgarian women were common between 1929–1933, as this made the former eligible for Bulgarian citizenship. No information on the number of Russian emigrant women in Bulgaria has been located so far. For further information, see Miroslav Iovanovich, “Adaptatsiia russkikh bezhentshev v Bulgarii, 1920–1940” [Adaptation of Russian emigrants in Bulgaria, 1920–1940],

(with the exception of those of the Workers' Party) agreed with the proposals, G. Enchev, representative of the BANU–*Vrabcha-1*, seized the opportunity to appeal to the Bulgarian legislators to extend the right of free maternal healthcare to needy Bulgarian citizens as well. Referring to the legal “barrier” which the Health Law had placed between poor Bulgarian citizens and their free treatment in state or municipal hospitals, Enchev pleaded for consideration to be taken of the “complete bankruptcy” of the municipalities, and to “revise or correct the wrongs” inflicted upon poor citizens.¹⁴⁹ His petition was ignored on the ground of administrative inconsistencies.¹⁵⁰

Yet, the increasing tendency towards authoritarianism and centralization in the state since 1934, supplemented with disturbing research data on people's living standards and persistently negative demographic numbers, eventually brought the state's attention back into welfare.

Comparative analysis of the pre-war and post-war population censuses in 1931 established that the pre-war phenomenon of prevailing higher female than male mortality rates amongst the population was continuing.

Table 2.1. Gender specific mortality rates in Bulgaria in the period 1906–1929¹⁵¹

Age	1906–1910		1921–1925		1928		1929	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
15–19	28.1	34.4	31.5	36.6	32.0	37.1	33.7	40.2
20–24	34.0	41.6	36.4	44.3	36.7	47.8	39.0	49.0
25–29	23.6	36.5	24.8	36.8	25.3	39.4	28.8	41.6
30–34	18.2	28.0	19.2	29.4	21.5	28.0	21.5	30.1
35–39	19.8	24.9	20.7	29.6	18.4	26.1	18.7	26.7
40–44	19.2	21.7	20.2	23.3	22.3	25.4	21.8	27.3

Whereas the 1920 census had revealed a predominance in male mortality attributed to the wars (1912–1918), the subsequent 1926 census con-

in *Bialata Emigratsiia v Bŭlgariia: Materiali ot Nauchnata Konferentsiia v Sofia, 23 i 24 Septemvri 1999* [The white emigration in Bulgaria: Papers of the scientific conference, 23 and 24 September 1999] (Sofia: Institut po istoriia pri BAN, 2001), pp. 87–96; Daskalov, *The White Emigration in Bulgaria*, p. 72. For a political history of the White emigration in Bulgaria see Liudmil Spasov, *Wrangelovata Armia v Bŭlgariia, 1919–1923* [Wrangel's army in Bulgaria, 1919–1920] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv Kl. Okhridski,” 1999).

¹⁴⁹ Enchev, *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Georgi Danailov, *Izsledvaniia vŭrkhu Demografiata na Naselenieto v Bŭlgariia* [A study of the demography of the population in Bulgaria] (Sofia, 1931), pp. 47–48, in Zheko Chankov, *Naselenieto na Bŭlgariia* [The population of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Knigoizdatelstvo “Kazŭnlushka dolina,” 1935), pp. 43.

firmed the resumption of the old pattern of higher female than male deaths and a peak in female deaths in the childbearing age group of twenty to forty. This phenomenon proved typical for all ethnic and religious groups in the country.¹⁵² It was acknowledged that in contrast to other, culturally more advanced European countries, Bulgarian female mortality was markedly higher, and two factors, hygienic and social economic circumstances, were considered to be responsible for this. Yet, this analysis did not lead to further conclusions or suggestions for legal intervention or practical initiatives.¹⁵³

New legislative tendencies in the field of healthcare, however, can be observed in the second half of the 1930s. These also included special provisions for professional natal care. According to the new Decree-Law for the Construction of Health Centers in Villages and Smaller Towns, issued in March 1938, each health center in the countryside was to be equipped with a maternity ward—"if possible." The resources were to be secured both from the regular budget of the respective municipality and by the General Directorate of People's Health (up to 100,000 levs)—the latter being financed by a special loan from the Bulgarian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank, guaranteed by the state.¹⁵⁴ A few months later, in January 1939, General Nedev, Minister of the Interior and People's Health, shared with the mass media his satisfaction with the increased resources allocated for public healthcare in the new state budget. He saw effective and cheap medical treatment for the population in all state and private hospitals, as well as in all sanitary units, as a particularly welcome state initiative for combating the falling birth rates and thus ensuring "beautiful and well-raised healthy children," as well as strong and healthy citizens who would "defend our home para-

¹⁵² For a comparative survey of distributions of death according to age and sex in the nineteenth century in Bulgaria, which confirm a long-established pattern of extremely high maternal mortality in the Bulgarian population, see Maria Todorova, *Balkan Family Structures and the European pattern: Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria* (Washington, DC: The American University Press, 1993), pp. 21–26, 92. A novel, twentieth-century development in Bulgaria, however, was the extension of high maternal mortality rates to the Muslim population. In contrast, in nineteenth-century Ottoman Bulgaria, Muslim women exhibited persistently lower mortality rates.

¹⁵³ Georgi Danailov, *A Study of the Demography of the Population in Bulgaria*, pp. 47–48, in Chankov, *The Population of Bulgaria*, pp. 42–46.

¹⁵⁴ Articles 1 and 10 in "Naredba-Zakon za Izgrazhdane na Zdravni Domove v Selata i v Po-malkite Gradove" [Decree-Law for the Construction of Health Centers in Villages and in Smaller Towns], *Dürzhaven Vestnik* [State gazette], No. 62 (21 March 1938), pp. 1121–1122.

dise.” Nedev equated healthy generations to “the foundations of the future of Bulgaria.”¹⁵⁵

The Bill for the Amendment and Supplement of Articles 54, 189, and 349 of the 1929 Health Law, presented by Petür Gabrovksi, Minister of the Interior and People’s Health, at the National Assembly in May 1940 and rapidly enacted thereafter without any further debate, removed poverty as a requirement for free advice and medical aid for pregnant women, and added dispensaries, besides hospitals, to the free medical services. The patients at these ceased to be defined in terms of poverty but were specified as “all pregnant women and young mothers, and all pre-school children.”¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, in all state and municipal healthcare units free medical treatment was expanded to include all children up to the age of seven, regardless of their economic background. All schoolchildren were granted free medical examination in state and municipal healthcare establishments and laboratories.¹⁵⁷

The Amendment’s brief preamble indicated that the implementation of preventive healthcare (as it had been conceptualized by the RF and the Democratic Alliance in 1929) had given rise to numerous problems which contradicted the law’s chief objectives—the protection and encouragement of births in Bulgaria. Contextualized within its historical framework, however, one significant aspect of the Amendment was that it represented the defeat of the imported American (RF) ideas of decentralization.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ “Dürzhavnitsite i narodnoto zdave” [Statesmen and people’s health], *Narodno Zdave* [People’s health], No. 3 (20 January 1939), p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ “Zakonoprokt za izmenenie i dopölnenenie Chlenove 54, 189 i 349 ot Zakona za Narodnoto Zdave” [Bill for the Amendment and Supplement of Articles 54, 189 and 349 of the health law], *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IRS*, 52 M (25 May 1940), p. 1496.

¹⁵⁷ Zakhari Zakhariiev, “Edna goliama zdravna reforma” [A principal health reform], *Public Assistance*, No. 8 (1940), 18–19, p. 18.

¹⁵⁸ However, the failure to “Americanize” Bulgarian health legislation should not be hastily interpreted as a failure of modernization due to Bulgarian backwardness, or as a manifestation of Bulgarian “domestication.” Following the history of American maternal health policy in the pre-Second World War period, the lapse of the Sheppard-Towner Act in 1929, i.e., the withdrawal of federal financial aid for maternal healthcare and child health work in the states, combined with the economic upheavals of the Great Depression, had a most unfortunate effect upon the state programs, too. Except for the sixteen state legislatures, which had appropriated amounts sufficient to equal the combined federal-state expenditures of previous years, in most other states child health work had been seriously curtailed. Physicians and nurses had been dismissed, cooperative arrangements with counties and local communities had been cancelled, and interest in child healthcare work diminished everywhere. In 1935, i.e., approximately at the same time when anxieties about healthcare services in Bulgaria were raised, the U.S. Social Security Act was passed. Its Title V, maternal and child health, ratified and expanded federally supported and state-administered programs of the earlier 1920 type,

The withdrawal of the state from its welfare duties towards its citizens had proved ineffective, even detrimental, to the country's child mortality rates. The mortality statistics, coupled to a hitherto unfamiliar, newly evolving phenomenon of falling birth rates and drastic fertility restrictions in the rural countryside (the major source of offspring in an agricultural country like Bulgaria), as well as the outbreak of the Second World War, created the circumstances in which urgent reconsideration of the earlier legislation was seen as necessary. It determinedly favored state intervention and a policy of protecting the lives of all members of the younger generation.

Significantly, the 1940 Amendment was enacted seven months before the infamous Law for the Defense of the Nation was passed in Parliament. Unlike the latter's ideology of racial privilege, the Amendment applied universally to all women and children in Bulgaria, regardless of their material status, race or religious affiliation.

and although far from comprehensive or uniform, it signified an established federal role in maternal health-care. With the onset of the Second World War, the U.S. established the emergency maternity and infant care program, a fully nationalized program with few or no eligibility restrictions, and no requirement for income means tests. For further details, see Macdonald, "Recent trends in federal aid to the states," p. 629; Tolleson-Rinehart, "Maternal healthcare policy," p. 198.

CHAPTER II

Public Assistance



In the second half of the 1930s and the early 1940s, the scope of state policies in the social welfare field expanded, and the state intervened directly in the family under the form of the 1934 Decree-Law for Public Assistance. The latter broadly targeted the most vulnerable social groups—"the absolutely destitute"¹—and child welfare became one of its main objectives. In the course of the following decade, public assistance became an umbrella-term under which new state legislative initiatives in the field of child welfare were enacted or former laws were amended and incorporated. Such were the amended Law for Children Born Outside Wedlock and their Avowal, and For Adoption in 1940, the Regulations for Family Allowances for Subsisting Workers' Children in 1942, and the latter's amended version in 1943. Much of the campaign for the 1943 Law for Large Bulgarian Families, as will be shown in Part Two, was also conducted within the rhetorical framework of public assistance. Within a short period of time, however, public assistance acquired additional ideological connotations, which linked welfare, including social policies towards the family and children, to political issues, such as social solidarity and state security.

While children and their well-being became the target of growing state concern in the second half of the 1930s and in the beginning of the 1940s—an awareness partly related to the threat and outbreak of the Second World War—Bulgarian legislators adopted a differentiated attitude towards the younger generation, based on whether or not they belonged to a legitimate family. Whereas children born within marriage were included in the field of state protectionism under the form of state-generated family allowances,

¹ See article 1, sub-article 1 of "Naredba-Zakon za Obshtestveno Podpomagane" [Decree-Law for Public Assistance], *Dürzhaven Vestnik* [State gazette], No. 196 (28 November 1934), in *Obshtestveno Podpomagane* [Public assistance], No. 4–5 (May 1939), pp. 128–135, here p. 128.

children born outside wedlock were excluded from the benefits of state-provided subsidy. Instead, state protection for children outside marriage was enacted by allotting unwed mothers the legal right to initiate paternity claims against the putative father and thus (partly) secure maintenance and inheritance for their child. In the case of illegitimacy public assistance took the form of state intervention in men's private life in order to impress legal obligations on fathers of illegitimate offspring and thus make them assume moral and economic responsibility for their "natural" child. The state, however, discouraged births outside wedlock as a social phenomenon by withdrawing its financial support for illegitimate children. Two legal categories of children thus emerged in Bulgaria in the Second World War period, referred to in subsequent sub-headings of the sections of this chapter as the "privileged" and the "disadvantaged" child.

1. State protection of the family: The privileged child

THE 1934 DECREE-LAW FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AND ITS LEGISLATIVE AFTERMATH

State initiatives in the field of child protection and welfare in the post-First World War period were first made in 1922, when the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union made a significant effort legally to provide for war victims, particularly the estimated 160,000 war orphans, by entitling the latter to state care and support for their upbringing and education until the age of maturity, and thus to prepare them, according to their individual capabilities and dispositions, for a "useful, productive, and independent existence on their own."² According to Kosta Tomov, Minister of War,³ the welfare of all war victims, i.e., disabled veterans, orphans, widows, and elderly parents

² "Zakonoproekt za Podpomagane Postradalite ot Voinite" [Bill for Assisting Victims of the Wars], *Stenografiski dnevnitsi na XIX obiknovenoto narodno sabranie* [Minutes of the XIXth ONA], III Emergency Session (ES), 14 Meeting (M) (20 June 1922), pp. 435–436.

³ Kosta Tomov (1888–1935): member of the BANU (since 1908), national deputy at the XVIIIth (1919–1920), XIXth (1920–1923), XXIIInd (1927–1931) ONA, Vice-Chair of the XIXth ONA (1920–1923), Minister of the Interior and People's Health (April–November 1921), Minister of War (Nov. 1921–Feb. 1923); dismissed from Stamboliiski's cabinet and from the BANU for factional activities; leader of the BANU–*Oran-zhev* (1926), short-term coalition partner of the BANU–*Vrabcha-1*, member of Aleksandür Tsankov's National Social Movement (1931). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 469–470.

of deceased soldiers, was “a duty of the state as they all had suffered a heavy loss and had been rendered almost completely unable to function as members of society.”⁴ Yet, as with other BANU welfare enterprises, this one, too, failed, opposed by the parliamentary opponents of the Agrarian Union.

It was only twelve years later, in November 1934, that finally a Law for Public Assistance⁵ (*Öffentliche Fürsorge* or *Assistance Publique*, as translated into German and French in the journal *Public Assistance*) was enacted as a decree of the Council of Ministers by the organizers of the military coup of 19 May 1934. The history of the latter law, however, had little in common with the Agrarians’ initiative, but dated back to a series of earlier parliamentary endeavors to introduce a public welfare law in 1910, 1918, 1925, and in January 1934.⁶ According to a monograph published in January 1937, the initial Bill of 1910 had been drafted by Gercho Büchvarov, a solicitor and ex-secretary-in-chief of the Ministry of the Interior and People’s Health, and had been strongly supported by Queen Eleanor Reuss of Kostritz, King Ferdinand’s second wife.⁷ In Büchvarov’s words, Queen Eleanor, appalled at the vast waste of public resources under the pretence of charity during the Christmas celebrations in 1910, had pleaded for the introduction of a legal form of “rational and honest support of the poor to increase the public funds for assistance and restrict their misuse.” The future act was supposed to define the target groups for help and how assistance was to be organized and the resources distributed equally amongst all needy.⁸ Inspired by this “woman with a great heart and deep and true feelings, with

⁴ “Bill for Assisting Victims of the Wars,” p. 435.

⁵ *Naredba-Zakon za Obshtestvenoto Podpomagane*.

⁶ *Zakonoproekt za Obshestvenite Grizhi i Blagotvoritelnost* [Bill for public welfare and charity work], *Minutes of the XIVth ONA, II Regular Session* [RS], RS, LXXXVI M (24 February 1910), pp. 41–43; *Zakonoproekt za Obshtestvenite Grizhi i Blagotvoritelnosta* [Bill for public welfare and charity work], *Minutes of the XVIIth ONA, IV RS*, 38 M (28 January 1918), p. 781; *Zakonoproekt za Blagotvoritelnosta* [Bill for charity work], *Minutes of the XXIst ONA, III RS*, 25 M (17 December 1925), p. 351; *Zakonoproekt za Obshtestvenoto Podpomagane* [Bill for public assistance], *Minutes of the XXIIIrd ONA, III RS*, 36 M (31 January 1934), p. 628.

⁷ Gercho Büchvarov, *Problemata za Obshtestvenoto Podpomagane i Predvidlivost: Pravna i Sotsialna Süshnost, Predpostavki, Zadachi, organizatsia do i prez 1910–1937 Godini* [The problem of public assistance and foresight: Legal and social essence, prerequisites, tasks, organization up to and in the period of 1910–1937] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa B.A. Kozhukharov, 1937), pp. 6–7. According to Henry Morgenthau, American ambassador at Constantinople from 1913 to 1916, Queen Eleanor had a sad and lonely existence in Bulgaria, spent exclusively attempting to improve the conditions of the poor in the country. For further details see chapter XXV in Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau’s story* (New York: 1918) at <http://www.cilicia.com/morgenthau/Morgen25.htm>; last accessed 28 March 2009.

⁸ Büchvarov, *The Problem of Public Assistance*, pp. 6–7.

a grand spirit of sacrifice on behalf of the socially needy,”⁹ Büchvarov was said to have drafted the Bill for Public Charity Work and offered it to the attention of Mikhail Takev, Minister of the Interior and People’s Health. The latter gladly presented it to the National Assembly in February 1910, yet the strong opposition of banks and charity associations prevented it from becoming a law. Thereafter, for twenty-five years Büchvarov claimed to have worked on the implementation of his draft, appealing to various interior ministers to support his legislative endeavors in the field of welfare. According to his monograph, his struggles were backed whole-heartedly only by the Bulgarian Women’s Union, who had educated and trained women welfare officers to work in charity crèches, orphanages, public canteens, and homes for the elderly.¹⁰ In February 1934, they too had submitted their petition for a public welfare law to the National Assembly.¹¹

After numerous personal disappointments and revisions of his original draft by ministry officials, and after the failed efforts of the Democratic minister of the interior to impose it on the National Assembly in February 1934, Büchvarov faced the possibility of seeing the efforts of a life-time locked up in a ministry drawer for good. Finally, on 5 June 1934 he pleaded with Kimon Georgiev,¹² the new prime minister after the May 1934 coup, to turn the bill into law for a “welfare organization of almost the perfect kind of its time.”¹³ Kimon Georgiev, being in Büchvarov’s laudatory words “a prudent and enlightened mind, a powerful, wise and willful politician, capable of foreseeing and creating” the social progress of his country, took his request to heart and eventually, in November 1934, the Bill became Bulgaria’s first Decree-Law for Public Assistance.¹⁴ Within the short period of

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰ The Bulgarian Women’s Union continued to criticize the on-going practice of money-squandering in the civil sector, instead of having it directed to charity in times of national distress and constraints. See “On fancy-dress balls,” *Zhenski Glas* [Women’s voice], No. 13 (15 March 1921), p. 3.

¹¹ Büchvarov, *The Problem of Public Assistance*, pp. 6–7.

¹² Kimon Georgiev (1882–1969): co-founder of the Military League (1919) and of the National Alliance (1922), one of the organizers of and participants in the 9 June 1923 and 19 May 1934 coups, and in the 9 September 1944 takeover; national deputy at the XX1st and XXIIInd ONA (1923–1927, 1927–1931); Minister of Railways (1926–1928), of Justice (May 1934–Jan. 1935), of Electrification (1950–1951, 1957–1959), Prime Minister (May 1934–Jan. 1935, 9 Sept. 1944–Nov. 1946), Deputy Prime Minister (1959–1962). An anti-royalist, he cooperated with the BANU *Pladne-1* (1935) and with the BCP (1936), was a member of the National Committee of the Fatherland Front (1943), and petitioned for Bulgaria’s reorientation toward the Soviet Union (Aug. 1944). For further details see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 115–117.

¹³ Büchvarov, *The Problem of Public Assistance*, p. 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

three years it was further amended and supplemented nearly ten times; yet the changes affected the administrative structures established by the law rather than its essence.¹⁵

Contemporaries of the 1934 Decree-Law for Public Assistance pointed to the elusive nature of its objectives as well as of its target-groups, the latter being broadly defined as “the absolutely destitute,” those unable to live on their own income or on their family’s support, and those “who will not be able to survive without assistance from outside” (Art. 2). Neofit Vidinski, vice-chair of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, specified the object of the law as “the most needy, the orphaned, the physically impaired, homeless children and the elderly,” who either represented the future citizens of the mother-country or were social unfortunates hoping to spend their final days in lesser misery.¹⁶ Article 4 of the Decree-Law, however, defined utmost impoverishment as a transitory stage rather than a life-long status, and the law aimed at “eliminating the factors responsible for destitution by providing relief to the recipient to help him/her to regain his/her economic and moral independence.”¹⁷ The inconsistencies in the identification of the law’s target-groups led to confusion and arguments within the newly-created Department for Public Care at the Ministry of the Interior and of People’s Health.¹⁸ However, they also provided the necessary flexibility for the executive power (of an increasingly authoritarian nature ever since May 1934) to accommodate the decree’s broad provisions to the demands of the moment. Most importantly, the decree’s complex rhetoric of public assistance, which alternatively emphasized either the recipient of public benefits (social support for the needy) or their provider (social support by the public),¹⁹ offered significant opportunities for ideological re-interpretations and adjustments to reflect changing political requirements. Thus, while the initial motives behind the decree were to regulate private philanthropy in the country, five years later, in January 1939, Dr N. Nikolaev, ex-Minister of the Interior and People’s

¹⁵ For a detailed account of the changes in the initial Decree-Law, see “Decree-Law for Public Assistance,” *Public Assistance*, No. 4 and 5 (May 1939), pp. 128–135.

¹⁶ “Pozhelaniia za deloto na obshtestvenoto podpomagane” [Benevolent comments on the future of public assistance], *Public Assistance*, No. 1–2 (February 1939), 1–9, p. 1.

¹⁷ “Decree-Law for Public Assistance,” p. 128.

¹⁸ “Benevolent comments on the future of public assistance,” pp. 6–7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Health,²⁰ elaborated the decree's new political purpose, namely, to "assist the state in its vital functions to solve numerous social issues":

Public assistance does not merely provide state relief from suffering to a certain group of citizens. Public assistance is also the necessary instrument for the state to convert the moral norms of charity and mutual support into a legal obligation, and thus cushion social differentiations and eradicate the physical and moral degeneracy of the nation.²¹

Other ex-ministers of the interior, such as Dr Aleksandŭr Girginov²² and Petŭr Midilev,²³ sided with Nikolaev's interpretation of public assistance as a form of social solidarity, and Midilev expressed hope that introducing it would also cushion the "most acute social contradictions" and "bolster social peace in the country."²⁴ Yet, Konstantsa Liapcheva, widow of ex-Prime Minister Andrei Liapchev and honorary representative of Bulgaria to the International Save-the-Children Union, anxiously pointed to the looming threat of a new world war, when children, the nation's hope for its future, would need special protection to survive so that the nation could resurrect itself in the war's aftermath.²⁵

The rhetoric combining the themes of public assistance and social peace and solidarity backed the introduction of other welfare legal acts implicitly touching upon social policies towards children in this period, and also accompanied the debates on the introduction of family allowances in Bulgaria and the eventual legislative provisions for children outside marriage in the early 1940s.

²⁰ Dr Nikolai Nikolaev (1887–1961): national deputy at the XXVth ONA (1940–1944); Minister of People's Education (1936–Jan. 1938), and of the Interior and People's Health (1938). For further details see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 326–327.

²¹ "Benevolent comments on the future of public assistance," p. 7.

²² Dr Aleksandŭr Girginov (1879–1953): one of the leaders of the Democratic Party, Minister of Finance (1931, 2–8 September 1944); Minister of the Interior and People's Health (Sept. 1932–May 1934); long-term national deputy; he opposed Bulgaria's participation in World War II, and petitioned for Bulgaria's reorientation toward the Soviet Union (Aug. 1944). Sentenced to one-year imprisonment by the People's Tribunal, he died in Belene detention camp. For further details see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 120–121.

²³ Petŭr Midilev (1875–1939): Minister of the Interior and People's Health (May 1934–Jan. 1935). For further details see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 288–289.

²⁴ "Benevolent comments on the future of public assistance," pp. 4–5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

2. Legislation on family allowances in Bulgaria

INTRODUCING FAMILY ALLOWANCES IN BULGARIA—A HISTORICAL OUTLINE

The background of the first Bulgarian legal act which introduced family allowances in state social policy is vague. Unlike other welfare initiatives in this period, the institution of family allowances was enacted without a formal statement of motivation. Neither the 1941 Law for Temporary Wage Increase of State Officials and Temporary Supplementary Family Subsidies,²⁶ nor the 1942 Decree, published in the *State Gazette* No. 166 of 1942 and enacted in practice as Regulations for Family Allowances for Subsisting Workers' Children²⁷ on 4 August 1942, bore the usual preamble to illuminate or justify their adoption. However, the 1943 amendment of the Regulations offered a brief insight into the legislators' reasoning, emphasizing the combination of social justice and pronatalist considerations as major driving forces behind the state's paternalistic intervention.

Surprisingly, the immediate post-1944 literature acknowledged and even praised the pre-1944 endeavors in the field of family allowances. The July 1947 issue of the bulletin *Labor Enlightenment*, which covered the legal aspects of the social protection of motherhood and childhood in Bulgaria, identified 1941 as the starting point of the Bulgarian family allowance scheme.²⁸ In 1946, Gencho Koichev, legal consultant in the Labor Directorate, Asen Tsanev, director of the Office for Family Allowances at the Labor Directorate, and Stefan Zarev, labor inspector for Sofia, wrote an unusually flattering (for the political circumstances of the moment) account of the nature of the 1942 and 1943 Regulations and described them as “a correct and well-elaborated social policy.”²⁹ Admitting the scant and “even non-exist-

²⁶ *Zakon za Vremenno Uvelichenie Zaplatite na Dürzhavnite Sluzhiteli i za Vremenno Dobavüchno Vüznergazhdenie za Semeino Polozhenie na Süshitite Sluzhiteli po Biudzhetata za 1941 Biudzhetna Godina.*

²⁷ *Pravilnik za Semeini Dobavki za Izdrüzhka na Rabotniceski Detsa.*

²⁸ Aleksandür Panaiotov (ed.), *Sotsialna zakrila na maichinstvoto i detstvoto* [Social protection of motherhood and childhood], *Trudova Prosveta* [Labor enlightenment], No. 7 (1947), pp. 27–28.

²⁹ Gencho Koichev, Asen Tsanev, and Stefan Zarev, *Rükovodstvo po Semeinite Dobavki i Ednokratnite Pomoshiti za Rabotnitsi pri Vsüpvane v Zakonen Brak i pri Razhdane na Zhivo Dete* [Guidelines for family allowances and lump-sum benefits for workers at legal marriage and live-birth] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa “Stopansko Razvitie,” 1946), p. 5.

ing” reference literature on family allowances in Bulgaria, they also congratulated the International Labor Organization upon its “timely idea” to supply Bulgarian experts with a copy of collected legislation on the variety of family allowance institutions in Europe and thus facilitate their study within a comparative, international perspective. According to Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, “a quick survey of this reference collection fills us with pride in our [Bulgarian—S.B.] social legislation, which ranks amongst the internationally most advanced forms of social support.”³⁰ The 1946 survey of family-oriented legislation defined family allowances as “a relatively new institution for our legal and social reality”³¹ and did not indicate when the above-mentioned reference material had been requested (before or after the 1944 political watershed for Bulgaria), nor which institution had ordered it. In contrast to *Labor Enlightenment*, however, it specified the 1942 Law as the first Bulgarian legal step to start a family allowance scheme. Earlier, in 1943, Nikolai Nikolov had expressed a similar opinion in his article, “The Foundations of social security in Bulgaria,” published in the *Bulletin of the General Labor Directorate and the Institute for Social Insurance*. He viewed the 1942 Law as the start of family subsidies for workers’ children in Bulgaria.³²

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE DISCOURSE

Research into the evolution of the family allowance scheme in Bulgaria, however, reveals that the 1942 Law was predated by the incorporation of family-related considerations in other earlier legal acts, and was influenced by the legal extension of the social insurance scheme into all societal branches between 1941 and 1943. In 1940, the Bill for Amending and Supplementing the Decree for Income Taxation³³ had included tax rebates based on marital status and parenthood, as well as tax increases for singles, divorcees and the childless widowed. The Bill had been gender-neutral, and had been cheered by the national deputies as “a praise-worthy initiative

³⁰ Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, *Guidelines for Family Allowances and Lump-sum Benefits*, p. 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³² Nikola Nikolaev, “Osnovite na sotsialnata sigurnost v Bŭlgariia” [The foundations of social security in Bulgaria], *Izvestia na Glavnata Direktsia na Truda i na Instituta za Obshtestveno Osiguruvane* [Bulletin of the General Labor Directorate and of the Institute for Social Insurance], No. 3–4 (March–April 1943), pp. 67–72, here p. 71.

³³ *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, II RS, 28 M* (17 December 1940), pp. 611–612.

of Dobri Bozhilov, minister of finance.”³⁴ Similarly, on 5 September 1941, the National Assembly had voted the Law for Temporary Wage Increase and Temporary Supplementary Family Subsidies of State Officials in the Kingdom.³⁵ It targeted both state and municipal employees and teachers from the mother-territory and the newly-acquired Aegean territories and provided a supplementary, child-related subsidy of 100 levs a month for a first child, an additional allowance of 100 levs for a second child, and a further monthly sum of 200 levs for any third plus child (Art. 2). (For comparison, 300 levs was the fixed monthly retirement pension of male agricultural workers, as set by law in 1941.³⁶) The state, as represented by the minister of finance, had allotted a further 222 million levs for the 1941 budget year to meet the new expenses.

In the context of the complex ideology of public assistance of the period, this family- and child-directed welfare law seemed to serve two purposes: to provide social security, and simultaneously, to sustain social peace and public order. In a separately-published edition, the Law for Temporary Wage Increase and Temporary Supplementary Family Subsidies of State Officials was included as an appendix of the amended version of the infamous Law for State Defense,³⁷ whose 1941 version aimed to fill the legislative gap created by the war climate. Its stated priority was to meet the challenges of “activities and facts, obviously directed against the domestic as well as the external security and safety of the state—activities which demand prompt and special measures.”³⁸ The measures were defined either as “exceptionally strict provisions against certain actions endangering the state and its self-preservation” (and severe fines, incarceration, and the death penalty were enforced in the country’s interior) or as “the introduction of new structures in response to the new conditions.” Whether the establishment of the institution of family allowances could or would become part of these structures for state defense, was left unexplained.

³⁴ Speech of P. Savov, *ibid.*

³⁵ *State Gazette*, No. 199 (9 September 1941), pp. 2–3.

³⁶ Nikola Konstantinov, *Sotsialnoto Osigurivane v Bulgariia, 1888–1951* [Social insurance in Bulgaria, 1888–1951] (Sofia: Natsionalen Osiguritelen Institut, 2001), p. 62.

³⁷ *Zakon za Zashchita na Dürzhavata: motivi, pülen tekst, vsichki izmeneia ot 1924 do 1941 vkluchitelno. Prilozhenie: Zakon za Vremenno Uvelichenie Zaplatite na Dürzhavnite Sluzhiteli* [Law for Defense of the State: Preamble, complete outline, all amendments from 1924 to 1941. Appendix: Law for Temporary Wage Increase of State Officials], *Pravna Biblioteka i Zakon*, No. 19 (1942), pp. 27–32.

³⁸ *Law for Defence of the State*, p. 2.

Yet, less than a year later, on 30 June 1942, Dobri Bozhilov presented a Bill for Improving the Material Status of State, Municipal, and Other Employees in the Kingdom³⁹, meant to cushion the rapidly deteriorating standard of living of civil servants both within the pre-April 1941 state boundaries and in the newly-acquired Aegean territories. Meanwhile, it also combined social policy toward the family and children with plain political ideology. Besides improved provisions for retirement, holidays, free medicine, and free travel fares,⁴⁰ the initial version of the Bill granted accommodation benefits, with rates which were salary-related and family-and-child dependent (150 levs per month for singles and widow/ers, and 200, 250, and 300 levs, respectively, if married and childless, and married with one, two, or more children). Alongside accommodation subsidies, it envisaged family allowances of 200 levs, solely coupled to the civil servant's married status and number of children in the family.⁴¹ Married civil employees in the Aegean territories were entitled to additional monthly benefits of 200 levs and to an extra 100 levs per child if joined by their families.⁴² Again, the Bill made no gender distinctions and the terms "widowed" and "married" were applied to both sexes.⁴³ Implicitly, however, it discriminated against children born outside marriage: benefits and allowances linked children to a legal marriage, thus reinforcing the importance of the family as a social institution in Bulgaria.

If the initial provisions of the Bill had been enacted, nearly 200,000 families (including teachers' families), according to Minister Bozhilov, would have benefited from them. The most extensive beneficiary group would have been the families of civil officials with a low annual income (up to 3,000 levs, i.e., the officially acknowledged poverty line), numbering 137,865 families altogether, as against 24,375 families whose annual earn-

³⁹ "Zakonoproekt za Podobriavane na Materialното Polozhenie na Dürzhavnite, Obshtinskite i Drugi Sluzhiteli v Tsarstvoto" [Bill for Improving the Material Status of State, Municipal, and Other Employees in the Kingdom], *Stenografski Dnevniitsi na XXV Obiknoveno Narodno Sübranie* [Minutes of the XXV ONA], *Emergency Session IV, Meeting 9* (30 June 1942).

⁴⁰ Sections II and III in "Zakonoproekt za Podobrenie na Materialното Polozhenie na Dürzhavnite, Obshtinskite i Drugi Sluzhiteli v Tsarstvoto" [Bill for Improving the Material Status of State, Municipal, and Other Employees in the Kingdom], *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV ES, 9 M* (30 June 1942), p. 299.

⁴¹ "Bill for Improving the Material Status of State, Municipal and Other Employees in the Kingdom," p. 299.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 298–299.

ings ranged between 3,001 and 6,000 leva, and those fortunate few 1,253 families whose income per annum exceeded 6,000 leva.⁴⁴

Formally, the idea of a family allowance scheme in the central and local governmental sectors was originally justified as part of the state's initiatives to prop up the standard of living of its employees. Implicitly, however, it was tied to a robust re-settlement policy on the part of the state, which aimed to secure a loyal civil apparatus especially in the "newly-acquired territories." Parliamentary debates illustrate how commonly the view of want and misery amongst state officials coexisted alongside the notion of a heavily overloaded bureaucratic machinery and infiltrated ingrained corruption—in times when a patriotic national spirit amongst Bulgarian civil employees was seen as both a condition and a must for the successful consolidation of the Bulgarian state.⁴⁵ As Angel Sinigov warned his fellow national deputies:

I fear that personal sacrifice has a limit. I fear that the most precious values and props of Bulgaria—the spirit, the morality and the will of her state and municipal employees, required to build a truly united, a truly great, powerful, and prosperous Bulgaria—might be sacrificed at the altar of poverty.⁴⁶

The final Law for Improving the Material Status of State, Municipal, and Other Employees in the Kingdom,⁴⁷ passed on 1 July 1942 without debate, confirmed that alarm over possible social unrest in the "liberated territories" had come to outweigh the general social considerations and had become the dominating motivation behind the legislation. Modifications of the Law had been introduced by the parliamentary commission the very previous morning, whereby regular family allowances of 200 leva per month were exclusively restricted to married civil servants in the Aegean territories, while state and municipal officials in the "mother-territory"

⁴⁴ Speech of Todor Kozhukharov, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV ES*, 9 M (30 June 1942), p. 302. See also the figures taken from the Statistical Office and provided by MP Angel Sivinov, *ibid.*, p. 311.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 308, 311, 312.

⁴⁶ See speech of Angel Sivinov, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV ES*, 9 M (30 June 1942), p. 312.

⁴⁷ "Zakon za Podobrenie na Materialnoto Polozhenie na Dürzhavnite, Obshtinski i Drugi Sluzhiteli v Tsarstvo-to" [Law for improving the material status of state, municipal, and other employees in the Kingdom], *Stenografski dnevnitsi na XXV obiknoveno narodno sübranie* [Minutes of the XXVth ONA], *Emergency Session IV, Meeting 10* (1 July 1942).

were granted a mere “lump-sum support.”⁴⁸ The law, however, codified an extra monthly allowance of 100 lev per child if the spouse and children of the official had joined him/her in the Aegean.⁴⁹

Nearly six decades later, Bulgarian historian Stoicho Grüncharov admitted that, although celebrated as “newly-liberated,” Vardar Macedonia and Aegean Thrace provided numerous challenges for Filov’s cabinets. While actively encouraging and economically supporting the return of ex-refugees from Aegean Thrace to their native places (over half of the 200,000 refugees, mostly agricultural workers, had heeded the call), Bulgaria had also been forced to deal with the generally hostile attitude of the ethnically non-Bulgarian settlers there. In Grüncharov’s opinion, the Bulgarian government had adopted the most appropriate approach to the “newly-liberated territories,” by implementing “an utterly Bulgarian legislation” there. Its balanced policy measures—which distinguished the Bulgarian political, economic and cultural presence markedly from the harsh German and Italian treatment of their occupied zones—was also, according to Grüncharov, the major reason for the quick recovery of these territories in the war’s aftermath.⁵⁰

THE DECREE FOR FAMILY ALLOWANCES (1942)

Whether the Decree for Family Allowances of the Council of Ministers that followed in 1942 and its 1942/1943 Regulations served a dual purpose, remains a question of debate. While they clearly attempted to compensate for the deteriorating living standard of workers’ families, they also targeted fertility increase and hence affected Bulgaria’s newly-adopted policy of population regulation at the beginning of the Second World War. Meanwhile, any violation of their legal provisions made the breaching agent, whether employer or employee, liable to the punitive measures under the 1940 Civilian Mobilization Law. Formally, the latter had been adopted as a “complex and delicate” state response to “abnormal conditions in an abnormal time,”⁵¹ and subjected all material, moral, and financial forces of the

⁴⁸ “Law for Improving the Material Status of State, Municipal, and Other Employees in the Kingdom,” p. 364.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Statelova and Grüncharov, *A History of Modern Bulgaria*, pp. 604–605.

⁵¹ Speech of Minister Nikolai Nikolaev, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IRS, 20 M* (29 March 1940), p. 397.

nation to the defense of the unity of the state. It also codified the demand for public assistance of the families of military levies and mobilized civilians who were to maintain the morale of the hinterland and safeguard the national collective from hostile foreign propaganda in the name of state stability and an eventual victory.⁵²

Contemporaries viewed the 1942 Family Allowances Decree and its 1942 Regulations as part of governmental legislative endeavors to sustain maternal and child healthcare in Bulgaria and provide state protection for large families.⁵³ However, although the issues were already in the public arena, the Law for Large Bulgarian Families had not yet entered parliamentary discussions. More likely, the 1942 Regulations were designed as yet another legal tool to put the idea of social solidarity into practice by redistributing the burden of workers' childcare among the better-off social layers and boosting the declining income of working families. Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev upheld a similar view in 1946, pinpointing rising inflation, economic instability in wartime, and economic crisis as the dominating incentives for the adoption of family allowances even in an international perspective.

In 1943, however, pronatalism became an explicit item on the agenda of the amended Regulations. Combining population concerns with the idea of social justice, it extended the target-groups eligible for welfare from central and local governmental sector employees and socially insured workers in private industry, to temporary employees, insured intellectuals, medical workers, and artists.⁵⁴ In accord with the 27th Decree of the Council of Ministers of 29 October 1943, the preamble of the 1943 Regulations for Family Allowances identified as driving forces behind their implementation besides "the current deteriorating living conditions" the ideology of social justice, equity, and the need for state protection for the family, the goal of population growth, too:

⁵² "Motivi kŭm Zakonoproekta za Grazhdanska Mobilizatsia" [Preamble to the Civilian Mobilization Bill], *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IRS, 19 M* (28 March 1940), p. 393.

⁵³ "Zakonodatelstvo" [Legislation], *Narod i Zdrave* [People and health], No. 8–9 (November 1942), pp. 241–244.

⁵⁴ Konstantinov, *Social Insurance in Bulgaria*, p. 67. Neither the 1942, nor the 1943 Family Allowances Regulations provided a clear-cut definition of the term "worker," but divided them according to the type of the employing enterprise instead. This, according to Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, created occasional legal confusion about who would fall into the scope of the entitled recipients, and was finally settled with the Amendment of the Regulations of 23 May 1946. For further details, see Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, *Guidelines for Family Allowances and Lump-sum Benefits*, pp. 14–15.

In order to provide equal treatment of all Bulgarian workers, heads of family with children, and in accord with the state's concern for its population growth and the consolidation of the family, family allowances are to be extended to all categories of manual and intellectual workers, with no exception, and are to be equalized in amount to those of state officials. Similarly, they are to be applied to newly married working couples and to working mothers at live childbirth.⁵⁵

The adopted family allowance scheme proved “parental” in its nature, and acknowledged equal rights to work, and hence to family allowances, for mothers and female relatives in charge of dependent children. Far from the concerns about female “homemakers” and male “breadwinners” common to much Western pronatalist legislation (France, Italy, Germany), Bulgarian legislators defined the “head of the family,” i.e., the legal recipient of allowances, as the person in charge of the children's support, “regardless whether this is the father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, brother, or sister.” If more than one family member was in employment, family allowances were granted to one breadwinner only, and no specifications were made about gender or generational status (Art. 3). The 1943 Regulations intentionally applied a completely gender-neutral work ideology to the Bulgarian family allowances scheme, which was a marked departure from the earlier Decree of 23 July 1942 and its 1942 Regulations. The latter had assigned the traditional role of head of the family to the father, while mothers had been regarded as such only under exceptional circumstances (e.g., if supporting both husband and children).

A possible explanation for this shift might be found in the soon recognized legal deficiencies of the 1942 Regulations, which resulted in numerous queries about their implementation in practice.⁵⁶ Implicit concerns about rising numbers of mobilized male civilians, and hence the extra burden for the support of children placed on women, should not be excluded as a possible cause, either. The 1943 Regulations expanded the generational scope of recipients by including grandparents (grandfathers and

⁵⁵ “Motivi kŭm 27-to Postanovlenie na Ministerskia Sŭvet, Vzeto na Zasedanieto mu ot 29 Oktomvri 1943, Protokol No. 155” [Preamble to the 27th Decree of the Council of Ministers from 29 October 1943, Protocol No. 155], in Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, *Guidelines*, pp. 91–92.

⁵⁶ Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, *Guidelines*, p. 12.

grandmothers alike) in the family allowances scheme and thus embracing dependent grandchildren, too, as part of the targeted support group. Unlike the 1940 Mobilization Law and its Regulations of 17 May 1940,⁵⁷ which had defined entitlements to state support according to households, i.e., “people living and eating together,” the Regulations for Family Allowances explicitly employed the broader term “family,” i.e., those related by blood. A child’s period of dependency was broadly fixed to the age limit of twenty-one, and no written distinctions were made between children born in marriage, adopted children, legitimated children, or stepchildren, as long as they were not involved in full-time employment and had no additional income. According to Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, children born outside wedlock, too, were included in the 1943 provisions.⁵⁸ This, however, was never made explicit in the Regulations, which specified a valid marriage certificate as a condition for eligibility for family subsidies. Faced with social intolerance towards illegitimacy and the state’s attempt to promote and protect legal marriage, the legislators seemed to have created (though unintentionally) an ambiguous niche, into which allowances for children born outside wedlock could be accommodated. However, the restrictive “eugenic” approach towards the recipient-groups in terms of required Bulgarian citizenship and ethnic Bulgarian origin (in accordance with the 1941 Law for the Defense of the Nation) was left untouched.⁵⁹

Family allowances were not tied to income levels but were determined according to the number of children in the family. In accordance with the legislation’s explicit pronatalist orientation after the enactment of the Law for Large Families in February 1943, their amount increased progressively with the number of children, from 100 leva for the first child, 200 leva for the second child, to 300 leva for the third and each subsequent child.⁶⁰

The pronatalist nature of the 1943 Family Allowance Regulations was further emphasized by special marriage lump-sum benefits introduced

⁵⁷ “Pravilnik za Osigurivane Izdržhkata na Semeistvata na Voenno ili Grazhdanski Mobiliziranite i na Povikanite na Vremenno Obuchenie Litsa, i za Organizatsiata i Deinostta na Organite za Tova” [Regulations for ensuring the support of the families of military levies or mobilized civilians, and of those temporarily summoned to military education, as well as the required organization and activities], *State Gazette*, No. 110 (17 May 1940), pp. 5–8.

⁵⁸ Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, *Guidelines*, p. 34.

⁵⁹ “Zakon za Zashchita na Natsiata” [Law for the Defense of the Nation], *State Gazette*, No. 16 (23 January 1941).

⁶⁰ See article 14 of the 1942 Regulations and article 18 of the 1943 Regulations.

for newly-wed male and female workers. Pronatalist provisions, however, were coupled to additional considerations of family protection and positive eugenics. The eventual goal was to enforce legitimate marriage unions as the legally acknowledged sexual norm in society and to ensure healthy offspring. Hence lump-sum marriage benefits were linked to age requirements (up to the age of twenty-eight for men and up to twenty-four for women) and were granted only at the presentation of a valid marriage certificate. The same applied to the newly-introduced lump-sum benefits at live childbirth.

The 1943 Regulations did not indicate whether these family benefits complemented or were independent of the marriage-loan provisions of the Law for Large Families. They were, however, enacted alongside a previous Decree of the General (Wartime) Supply Commissariat of March 1941 and a recent Decree of the Council of Ministers of 21 July 1943, which aimed to “observe and respect an old tradition, part of the marriage ritual.”⁶¹ The decrees granted special privileges to engaged couples to facilitate the purchase of their wedding outfit (shoes and clothes) and wedding rings. The latter were exempt from an otherwise 100 per cent excise on jewelry.

While family allowances, marriage and live childbirth benefits were tax-free; their entitlement and scope was bound to employment. The number of days spent by the worker in full-month service was the deciding factor. Paid holidays, days off for family purposes, sick leave (up to three months), part of the fixed pre-natal period (according to the 1924 Social Insurance Law), and maternity leave (up to six months, with regard to the 1936 Decree-Law for Labor-Contract) counted toward full-time employment.⁶²

BINDING SOCIAL WELFARE AND PUBLIC SECURITY

Compared to other European countries (France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries, as well as the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Austria), Bulgaria established her family

⁶¹ “Motivi kŭm Proektoreshenie ot Ministŭra na Finansite za Odobrenie Postanovlenie No. 40 na Ministerskia Sŭvet, Vzeto na Zasedaniето mu ot 4 Juni 1943 otnosno Osvobozhdavane ot Taksa vŭrkhu Fakturnata Stoinost Venchalnite Khalki” [Preamble to the draft resolution of the minister of finance for approving Decree No. 40 of the Council of Ministers, taken on 4 June 1943 with regard to exempting wedding rings from excise], *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, I ES*, 2 M (21 July 1943), p. 18.

⁶² “Naredba-Zakon za Trudoviia Dogovor” [Decree-Law for Labor Contracts], *State Gazette*, No. 200 (5 September 1936); Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, *Guidelines*, pp. 25–26.

allowances system rather late, and in times which, internationally, were marked by strong state intervention into family welfare and generally with the tightening of the state's role in internal policies.⁶³ In the case of Bulgaria, the absence of previous initiatives in the field of family allowances was combined with extreme political pressure from outside (on the part of both Germany and the Soviet Union) and within the country, where conditions were disturbed by the development of a Soviet-encouraged communist guerrilla movement and the creation of the Fatherland Front in autumn 1942. The historical circumstances left their imprint on the implementation of Bulgaria's family allowance scheme, tying it to exclusive state regulation and state initiative. The control of the family allowance scheme was delegated to a newly set up Office for Family Allowances for Workers' Children at the General Labor Directorate, whose members included the director of the Labor Inspectorate, mayors as occasional representatives of local labor inspectorates, and private employers. The financial administration of the scheme in the field of private business was placed in the hands of a newly established fund at the Bulgarian National Bank, which was subsidized by compulsory monthly installments on the part of private employers. This, according to Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, had provoked strong objections in business circles,⁶⁴ which however were totally ignored by the state. The ten per cent wage contributions to the family allowance fund, as envisaged by the 1942 Regulations, were rebalanced according to the differing financial capacities of the private enterprises (ten per cent from the gross wages of industrial firms, private mines, electric power stations; eight per cent from trading companies; and five per cent from craftsmen and other private employers). Family allowances in the state and municipal sectors were covered by the state budget.

In retrospect, it is clear that the 1942–1943 family allowance scheme was quickly becoming one of the keystones of a rapidly developing comprehensive state and social security policy toward families and children. Welfare support for working families was state-controlled and administered, and it combined social support with pronatalist and state security objectives, thus meeting the demands of both working citizens and national state

⁶³ Koichev, Tsanev, and Zarev, *Guidelines*, pp. 10–11.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

alike. Its provisions and ideology, obviously in step with the requirements of the new political era, for the most part passed directly into post-World War Communist legislation. With few amendments, they became the backbone of Order No. 1076 of 30 May 1946, issued by Mr Georgi Popov, minister of social policy, meant to shape the new, socialist family allowances requirements and procedures.⁶⁵

2. The disadvantaged child: The Law for Children Born Outside Marriage and Their Avowal, and for Adoption, November 1940

The 1934 Decree-Law for Public Assistance had emphasized the obligations of the family to provide support in times of crisis and emergency and had specified that it was only if the kin failed to do so that the state would intervene to grant relief. Yet it was only in 1937 that the responsibilities for mutual support between family members were spelled out and codified in the Decree-Law for Compulsory Support.⁶⁶ The latter laid down that older generations were obliged to provide for their offspring, including minors, if the latter proved unable to live on the income from their property or labor. Such support embraced all the life-needs of the recipients, as well as their education and vocational training. The level of maintenance was expected to correspond to the social standing of the provider, but at the same time was not to exceed the limits of the latter's earnings and thus force him or her into penury. The Decree-Law applied to both men and women equally, although fathers were recognized as the first and major provider for their children, whereas mothers were compelled to play this role only if fathers failed to secure support. According to Aleksandŭr Kozhukharov's explanatory article on the law in July 1938,⁶⁷ the motives behind the 1937 Decree-Law can be seen as part of the state's intense and complex campaign to impress upon Bulgarian society that the notion of family should form the

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 111–113.

⁶⁶ "Naredba–Zakon za Zadŭlzheniata za Izdrŭzhka" [Decree-Law for Compulsory Support], *State Gazette*, No. 271 (7 December 1937), pp. 4738–4739.

⁶⁷ Aleksander Kojucharoff, "Unterhaltungsverpflichtung nach Bulgarischen Positiven Recht," *Zeitschrift für Osteuropäisches Recht* [Journal for East European law], No. 1 (July 1938) pp. 2–18.

elementary unit of the national collective (*die Auffassung über der Familie als Grundorganismus der Volksgemeinschaft*). This concept was considered essential for modernizing the country's legislation according to positive, as opposed to "natural" law,⁶⁸ and for restricting the authority of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the field of matrimony (*der Drang nach Beschränkung der kirchlichen Gewalt*). It was within the ideological framework of the 1937 Decree-Law for Compulsory Support that the vital amendment of the old Law for Illegitimate Children was passed in the National Assembly in November 1940.

Debates on the need for a radical reform of the existing law (dating from 1890) had been going on in legal and (partly) medical circles for the previous three decades, and ideologies of modernization, child welfare, and public security, but also women's issues, became the discursive tools which were most frequently resorted to.

Most of the legal discussions, however, were conducted in the pages of professional journals—*Juridical Review*, *Juridical Thought*, and *Legal Thought*. The articles commonly referred to each other and frequently summarized their two initial sources. These were Konstantin Vachov's article, "In search of the father," of 1911, and Dr Simeon Angelov's views accompanying his Bill for the Avowal and Legitimization of Children Born Outside Wedlock, and for Adoption, published in 1924.

Two factors accounted for a general absence of wider public interest in this otherwise highly relevant issue—the low number of children born outside marriage in Bulgaria, and the rigidly conservative attitude of Bulgarian society on the subject of illegitimacy itself.

Statistical data published by Professor Dimitür Mishaikov in 1914 had estimated the number of illegitimate children born in Bulgaria in 1907 at 869 altogether, in contrast to 180,284 children born within marriage. Compared to her neighbors Serbia and Romania, Bulgaria ranked lowest in the Balkans in terms of illegitimacy, with a ratio of just 0.48 per cent,⁶⁹ which was three

⁶⁸ Positive law is defined as statutory, man-made law, as opposed to "natural law," which is purportedly based on universally accepted moral principles, "God's law," and/or derived from nature and reason. The term "positive law" was first used by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651).

⁶⁹ In the original, the illegitimacy ratio for Bulgaria is given as "per thousand," while that of other European countries as "per cent." In order to avoid misunderstanding, I have converted the illegitimacy ratio for Bulgaria into "per cent."

times lower than that of Serbia and twenty-one times less than Romania.⁷⁰ Despite a subsequent rise to three per cent by 1938, Bulgaria still stood far behind most other European countries, such as Italy, Yugoslavia, France, Finland, Germany, Hungary, and Romania, where illegitimacy ratios were markedly higher—4.5, 5.2, 6.5, 7, 8, 8.7, and 10 per cent, respectively.⁷¹

Likewise, as the legal discourse indicated, traditional Bulgarian society seems to have maintained a prejudiced attitude towards unwed mothers and their children. In the late nineteenth century, Bulgarian ethnographer Dimitŭr Marinov⁷² collected a set of what was considered Bulgarian customary laws in the northwest of the country. There, the phenomenon of illegitimacy was viewed with rigid intolerance, and coupled to collective community disgrace. An illegitimate child was considered nobody's child and could end up abandoned at a crossroad or murdered in order to spare the shame to its mother.⁷³

As this customary law—albeit insufficiently documented—continued to play a vital role in the post-1878 legal practice of the country, informing the judgments of magistrates in contested cases,⁷⁴ Bulgarian lawyers and historians of Bulgarian law recognized that the traditional rejection of mother and child outside wedlock was a crucial factor influencing the hitherto totally restrictive legislation on illegitimacy.⁷⁵ The introduction of the Law for Children Born Outside Wedlock and Their Avowal was thus a legal breakthrough in Bulgarian society, the culmination of decades of struggle to modernize Bulgarian legislation dealing with social deviance. Attempts

⁷⁰ Dimitŭr Mishaikov, "Statisticheski belezhki vŭrhu balkanskite dŭrzhavi" [Statistical notes on the Balkan countries], *Demokratsheski Pregled* [Democratic review], No. 2 (1914), p. 134.

⁷¹ Vasil Mitakov, "Motivi kŭm Zakonoproekta za Izvŭnbrachnite Detsa i tiakhnoto Uzakoniavane, i za Osinovivavane" [Preamble to the Law for Children Born Outside Marriage and Their Avowal, and for Adoption], *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, II R S, 8 M* (12 November 1940), p. 162.

⁷² For further details on Marinov's collection, see Margarita Vasileva, "Novi danni za etnografското delo na Dimitŭr Marinov" [New data on the ethnographic work of Dimitŭr Marinov], in Dimitŭr Marinov, *Narodna viara i religiozni obichai* [Folk beliefs and religious customs] (Sofia, 1994), pp. i–xiii.

⁷³ Dimitŭr Marinov, *Zhiva starina* [Antiquity alive], No. 6 (Sofia: 1907), pp. 144, 149, 175, and 176, cited in Iliia Kozhukharov, "Direneto na bashtata" [In search for the father], *Iuridicheska Misŭl* [Juridical thought], No. 2–3 (1923), pp. 78–97, here p. 84.

⁷⁴ S. S. Bobchev, *Obichai i zakon. Stranitsa iz "istorji drevnobulgarskogo prava"* [Customs and law: Pages from "the history of the ancient Bulgarian law"] (Sankt Peterburg: Tipografia Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1906), pp. 14–15; N. Dumanov, "Obichaiat v nasheto polozhitelno pravo" [Customs in our positive law], *Advokatski Pregled* [Solicitor's review], No. 19 (June 1929), pp. 231–3, here p. 231.

⁷⁵ Kozhukharov, "In search for the father," pp. 83–85; Nikola Zlatarski, "Tŭrseneto na bashtata" [Searching for the father], *Iuridicheski Arkhiv* [Juridical archive], No. 4–5 (1934), pp. 375–401, here p. 385.

to secure better treatment and maintenance for illegitimate children and to curb their high mortality rates had been at the forefront of legislative concerns even earlier. Yet, it was the menace of the Second World War for Bulgaria, coupled to the need to sustain social order and impose strict regulations on the country's domestic life, which eventually forced Bulgarian legislators to look back on previously repudiated legal attempts to provide for illegitimate children and to grant the latter the right to seek maintenance from their putative father.

EARLY LEGAL DEBATES AND MODERNIZATION

It was out of a sense of a need to update the law for children born outside marriage, and to make it more compatible with the legislation of those states deemed to represent "modern" Europe, that the early debates on the relationship between putative father, unwed mother and children outside marriage emerged in the pre-First World War period. Without exception, the arguments, which appeared occasionally on the pages of legal magazines, centered on the need to reform the old Law for the Avowal and Legitimation of Illegitimate Children, and for Adoption from 1890. In particular, they attacked its notorious Article 10, according to which any legal attempts to establish paternity were strictly forbidden. Drafted by Dimitŭr Tonchev, Minister of Justice (1886–1891)⁷⁶ in 1890, the old law reproduced quite literally the provisions of its source, Article 340 of the French Code Civil from 1804.⁷⁷ Yet, the restrictive Napoleonic original had nevertheless permitted pursuit of paternity in the case of abduction and rape, whereas its Bulgarian equivalent placed a total ban on the search for the father. According to solicitor Nikola Zlatarski's personal investigation into the motives behind the law, Minister Tonchev had intentionally deviated from the French original in order "to protect the well-preserved morals of the public life of those days and to match the moral views of the national deputies, who would have rigorously opposed any options for paternity suit."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Dimitŭr Tonchev (1859–1937): Minister of Justice (1886–1891), Minister of Trade and Agriculture (1894), Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cults (1900–1901), Minister of Finances (1913–1918). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 470–472.

⁷⁷ On the history of civil law in Bulgaria, see also Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Law*, pp. 127–131.

⁷⁸ Zlatarski, "Searching for the father," p. 385.

As early as the first decade of the twentieth century, some Bulgarian lawyers had started voicing their objections against the reactionary rigidity of Article 10. In this they were influenced by heated contemporary debates in France on the paternity issue, which they seemed to have followed closely. In 1911, Konstantin Vachov protested that Bulgarian law alone within the entire body of European legislation was still upholding an absolute and draconic prohibition against searching for the father to hold him responsible for child support.⁷⁹ The more liberal provisions in France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Holland, and Russia had already recognized the right of children born outside wedlock to make certain paternity claims, or were about to be reformed to do so.

Vachov,⁸⁰ and two years later P. Stoinov (the latter writing from Paris), appealed to the conscience of the Bulgarian legislators to revise Bulgarian law, outlining the detailed history of the Napoleonic law on illegitimacy up to the point of its most recent amendment in 1912. As part of the so-called Code Napoleon, the French law had been enacted to protect the political and class interests of the bourgeoisie. It had substituting the old, pre-Revolutionary principle of *creditus virgini* (according to which the mother was entitled to identify the putative father of her child) with the prohibition of *la recherché de la paternité est interdite*, thus shielding the well-to-do *paterfamilias* from potential blackmail and public scandals.⁸¹

Yet, whereas the original French motives for promoting the infamous piece of legislation (as laid out by one of the four authors of the Napoleonic Code, jurist F. J. J. Bigot de Préameneu) could partly be justified by certain legal failures in the practice of the pre-1804 period, it had very little in common with contemporary notions of social morals or legal justice. According to Vachov, the 1804 French law could have increased the burden of paternity proof instead of imposing severe misfortune “on those for whom it was designed and to whom it was applied.”⁸² Vachov identified the law’s unfortunate consequences as infanticide and/or misery and social degradation

⁷⁹ Konstantin Vachov, “Direneto na bashtata” [In search for the putative father], *Iuridicheski Pregled* [Juridical review], No. 5 (1911), pp. 306–317, here p. 307.

⁸⁰ No further details on Vachov and Stoinov have been found so far.

⁸¹ Vachov, “In search for the putative father,” p. 306; P. Stoinov, “Noviiat frensko zakon vŭrkhu direneto na bashtata” [The new French law regarding paternity suits], *Iuridicheski Pregled* [Juridical review], No. 7 (1914), pp. 460–465, footnote 2 (**), p. 460.

⁸² Vachov, “In search for the putative father,” p. 306.

for both mother and child, whereas the wrong-doer—the man—protected and given a free hand by “the laws which he had coined for himself,” walked away scot-free and publicly untouched.⁸³

“Fortunately,” he explained, this legal shortcoming had been successfully redressed in France and finally, in the amended law of 1912, the restrictive provisions of the Code Napoleon had been revised in favor of the single mother.⁸⁴ In France, women were granted the legal right to search for their illegitimate baby’s father in the case of abduction, rape, seduction, or *concubinage noire* (publicly-known extra-marital cohabitation), and in cases when the father himself had openly supported the child as his own (*possession d’état d’enfant*), or if he had recognized the child in documents and writings.⁸⁵

Vachov and Stoinov wholeheartedly accepted the French 1912 amendment and underlined that it had shifted the legal focus from mere financial reimbursement and support of the mother toward the acknowledgement of the child’s legal rights.⁸⁶ The amended law was, as acknowledged by French society itself, a vital step towards the reformation of the institution of marriage and society, and was a part of French population policies. Its ultimate goal was “to moralize marriage, to regulate sexual cohabitation and relations, to reduce cases of abortion and infanticide, to check the vagabondage of abandoned children, and, finally, to contribute to the increase of the population.”⁸⁷ Interestingly, neither Vachov nor Stoinov nor any of their successors in the dispute made any reference to the prior French Revolutionary Code of 1793, which had codified equal legal rights of both legitimate and illegitimate offspring⁸⁸ (and which the Code Napoleon had later rescinded).⁸⁹

⁸³ Vachov, “In search for the putative father,” pp. 306–307.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 307.

⁸⁵ Stoinov, “The new French law,” pp. 463–464.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 462.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 465.

⁸⁸ A detailed account of the French Revolutionary Code and children born outside marriage is provided by Crane Brinton, *French Revolutionary Legislation on Illegitimacy 1789–1804* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

⁸⁹ On the changes introduced in the French Civil Code under Napoleon and directly affecting the status of illegitimate offspring see James F. McMillan, *France and Women 1789–1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), as well as Irene Collins, chapter V: “The Purge,” in *Napoleon and his Parliaments 1800–1815* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), pp. 56–67. According to Collins, it was the second bill of the Civil Code in 1801 which harmed the unwed mother’s position by withdrawing her right to search for the father. The deputy Benjamin Constant was said to have introduced “a little excitement by attacking article 60, which allowed the mother of an illegitimate child to name the father for purposes of a birth certificate,” since, he argued, it stigmatized “the man’s conduct for no practical purpose,” allowed women to make “false accusations

While France was moving ahead and modernizing its legislation, the Bulgarian legal reality seemed different. Whereas French women had enjoyed the right to claim financial support from their abuser in cases of rape or seduction even prior to the 1912 modification, Bulgarian law had remained silent on this issue. It was only via the enactment of the Law for Obligations and Contracts,⁹⁰ a literal translation into Bulgarian law of Article 1382 from the French *Code Civil*, that seduced and abandoned Bulgarian women were provided with a slight opportunity to appeal to the court to be reimbursed for their pregnancy and birth-related expenses, though not to bring a paternity suit. Yet Vachov objected that even then the Bulgarian judiciary had been hesitating until 13 October 1909 to interpret as moral harm an unmarried mother's plea on the grounds of inflicted damages, and had been, furthermore, slow afterwards to apply in practice the supreme court's decision, initiated by the minister of justice himself.⁹¹

Vachov and Stoinov suggested that Bulgarian legislators should adopt a modern, more humane attitude towards the issue of illegitimacy. The striking-out of article 10 and the reform of Bulgarian law were essential in order "to correct social injustice," to live up to the norms and the spirit of modern society, and to protect the rights of its individual members.⁹² In addition, the reform of article 10 had become "a must" if the country, recovering from the wounds and calamity inflicted by the Balkan wars, was to catch up with the latest achievements of the European nations and "thus reduce her heavy losses."⁹³

of which the men in the question were not informed," and in addition, "was a useless concession to the mother," as it did not entitle her to claim maintenance from the man. Although a few speakers took up the point, the bill was accepted with a large majority (25–28 December 1801).

⁹⁰ "Zakon za Zadülzheniata i Dogovorite" [The Law for Obligations and Contracts], *State Gazette*, No. 268 (5 December 1892) was enacted on 1 March 1893. According to Professor Mikhail Andreev, it was an "almost literal translation of the corresponding sections of the Italian Civil Law, which, on its part, was borrowed from the French *Code Civil*, though with some modifications imposed by practice." The Law for Obligations and Contracts codified the autonomous will of the two contracting parties as legally binding. According to Article 29, any consequences of the contract which touched upon "justice, custom and law" became binding, too. Violations of the contract's initial clauses were to be settled in court only. For further details, see Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Law*, pp. 119–122.

⁹¹ Vachov, "In search for the putative father," p. 309. The minister of justice referred to but not named by Vachov is Todor Krüstev (1865–unknown), member of the Democratic Party. Krüstev majored in law with a PhD in Brussels in 1892, and worked as judge in Sofia and as solicitor in Plovdiv before joining Aleksandür Malinov's first cabinet as Minister of Justice (1908–1910) and his second cabinet as Minister of Agriculture and Commerce (1910–1911). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, p. 250.

⁹² Vachev, "In search for the putative father," p. 318.

⁹³ Stoinov, "The new French law," p. 460.

The dispute was rekindled in the post-First World War period, when in 1923 Iliia Kozhukharov, member of the Tŭrnovo District Court, argued that it was unjustified to uphold an austere customary code of traditional morality, applied to the socially most vulnerable:⁹⁴ “Article 10 of the Law for illegitimate children corresponds neither to the conditions of modern life, nor to any requirements of justice, and it has to follow the fate of its French prototype, article 340 of *Code Civil*.”⁹⁵ Liuben Dikov,⁹⁶ Professor of Law and later Minister of Justice (1935), was of the same opinion in 1932. In his *Course in Civil Law*, he emphasized that it was only Serbia, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria which were still imposing restrictions in their legislation in regard to paternity suits.⁹⁷

On 1 December 1933, Nikola Zlatarski, a solicitor, held a public presentation at the Second Meeting of the Bulgarian lawyers in Sofia and appealed for urgent intervention to deal with the outdated legislative regulations concerning a child’s or a woman’s right to prosecute the putative father. He pointed out that the rigid provisions for illegitimate children which had also been adopted in the Italian Civil Law’s article 189 from the Code Napoleon had been legally challenged ever since the beginning of the twentieth century, when Gianturco, Zanardelli, and Scialoja submitted their alternative bills. A new bill was currently under discussion in Italy, which envisaged substantial reform of the old law in favor of the child and its mother. The international tendency was towards liberalization of the law, and no doubt the bill would soon become law.⁹⁸

Although Zlatarski saw international developments in the field of legislation for unwed offspring as a role model for Bulgarian legislators to follow, he did not discuss the background of the newly-debated Italian modifications, but seemed to be far more interested in pursuing his own legislative goal, namely, to ease the plight of illegitimate children and their mothers. He entirely ignored the motives of the two 1933 Italian laws, the one redefining the ONMI (*Opera nazionale per la protezione della mater-*

⁹⁴ Iliia Kozhukharov, “In search for the father,” p. 84.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁹⁶ Dr Liuben Dikov (1895–1973): Dean of the Law Faculty (1927–1929) and Rector of Sofia University (1933–1934); Minister of Justice (Jan.–April 1935). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 151–152.

⁹⁷ Liuben Dikov, *Kurs po Grazhdansko Pravo* [A course in civil law] (Sofia: 1932), p. 129.

⁹⁸ Zlatarski, “In search for the father,” p. 382.

nità e dell' infanzia)⁹⁹ and its responsibilities, and the other designating responsibility for abandoned and illegitimate children by placing the assistance for illegitimate and abandoned children back onto the local governments and *communi*. The ideological justification of the Italian practice was rooted in the claim that a so-called “immoral situation” had been created by the earlier legislation, which resulted in women preferring not to marry.¹⁰⁰ Zlatarski, however, kept quiet about the new Italian motivations and continued to refer to Bulgarian 1890 legal arrangements, describing these as “absolutely unacceptable.” Their amendment “represents an issue of great legal and social interest, the settlement of which could not be delayed any longer.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, in 1936, Vasil Mitakov, future minister of justice, criticised the 1890 law as “based on considerations which, in their crucial part, have already lost their legal and social justification.”¹⁰²

IN THE NAME OF THE CHILD AND ITS MOTHER,
AND ... SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

For nearly thirty years, the debates had focused on the need to improve an unwed mother's lot, and to establish an illegitimate child's position both in the family and in society. Bulgarian lawyers attempted to stir the political conscience concerning the grave social injustice inflicted on the category of

⁹⁹ National Organization for the Protection of Motherhood and Infancy. The OMNI was created in 1925, after the 1903 Belgium *Oeuvre Nationale pour l'Enfance*, and its original motives were linked to the fight against high infant mortality, and especially that of abandoned children. Since 1927, it was associated with Mussolini's appeal to strengthen the country's demography (and fertility, in particular) as the basis of the nation's political, economic, and moral strength. Whereas before 1923, illegitimate children were handed into Italian foundling homes anonymously, i.e., in turning boxes, according to the 1923 reform, maternal anonymity was formally eliminated as the reception of illegitimate offspring was only permitted by direct consignment. Moreover, unwed mothers were encouraged to nurse and relate to their own children, and special maternal incentives were set up, including payment for nursing, and financial rewards if the illegitimate child was officially recognized. Local governments continued to be responsible for funding and managing foundling homes, yet since the creation of OMNI, this role was significantly taken over by the latter. In 1933, however, under the pressure of Sileno Fabbri, OMNI's new president, this practice was ended. The 1927 provisions for illegitimate mothers were redefined as creating an “immoral” situation, and after April 1933, responsibility for abandoned and illegitimate children was restored to the provinces and *communi*. For further details, see Carl Ipsen, *Dictating Demography: The Problem of Population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 68–69, 147–151.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 147–150.

¹⁰¹ Zlatarski, “In search for the father,” p. 375.

¹⁰² Vasil Mitakov, “Proekt za nov Zakon za Izvünbrachnite Detsa i Usinoviavaneto” [A project for a new law for children born outside wedlock, and for adoption], *Pravna Misul* [Legal thought], No. 8 (1936), pp. 587–597, here p. 587.

seduced and abandoned women and their illegitimate offspring and to provoke sympathy towards their plight by basing their rhetoric on the combination of ideas from international authors juxtaposed with Bulgarian data.

While the early discourse, as poor as it was in Bulgaria, dwelled on the individual tragedy of the woman and her child, in the 1930s the emphasis shifted to a more authoritarian ideology, where societal integrity and stability came first.

In 1923, Iliia Kozhukharov viewed the right to search for the father as an ethical and social, rather than juridical matter. No law could abuse the fundamental code of morality, which differentiated a human being from a cruel, sexually-unrestrained beast. Kozhukharov cited Swiss Professor Auguste Forel,¹⁰³ renowned scientist, psychiatrist, social reformer, supporter of women's rights, socialist, and pacifist, and author of the celebrated book *The Sexual Problem* (1905). According to Forel's work, as quoted by Kozhukharov, a sexual act, if freely consented by both partners, was void of harm and was morally indifferent. If, however, the latter resulted in the birth of a child outside wedlock, it already assumed the nature of damage.¹⁰⁴ In Kozhukharov's views, the 1890 Bulgarian law brutally violated human senses. Though extramarital cohabitation was not to be encouraged, it, nevertheless, was part of the social and economic reality, and together with rape and seduction, could hardly signal a deliberate desire on the part of women for their own social and physical ruin.

Kozhukharov expressed his amazement at the way the law had been voted in by the National Assembly thirty years ago:

The essential social problem of extra-marital cohabitation between a man and a woman, and its far-reaching consequences which the law deals with, were brushed away as if unnoticed in Parliament¹⁰⁵ ... as if this were a boring, tiresome issue, which the deputies attempted to shed as soon as possible by avoiding further debates.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Auguste Henri Forel (1848–1931), alongside the German Magnus Hirschfeld and the English sex researcher Havelock Ellis, became co-president of the *Weltliga für Sexualreform* [The world league for sexual reform], 1928–1935, whose members ranged from Soviet Aleksandra Kollontai to American Harry Benjamin, <http://www.edimuster.ch/abstinenz/forel.htm>; last accessed 28 March 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Auguste Forel, *Polovata Nравstvenost* [The sexual question] (1905), p.71, cited in Kozhukharov, "In search for the father," p. 80.

¹⁰⁵ Kozhukharov, "In search for the father," p. 80.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Article 10, however, was an act whose only consequence was the demoralization of the wretched woman and her final degradation into prostitution. “Why should we be surprised then to learn that brothels recruit their staff mostly among maiden-mothers, who have been denied legal support to pursue their seducer,” Kozhukharov exclaimed.

Kozhukharov referred to the earlier plea of a certain Bulgarian Professor Vladimirov in favor of illegitimate mothers. Vladimirov,¹⁰⁷ it seems, had treated illegitimacy as the result of the combination of female naivety and male vice, which lured girls into extramarital cohabitation in a society that offered no legal protection for women. As such, the problem required the intervention of sociologists, medical officers, and legislators in order to receive its proper legal treatment.¹⁰⁸

In his report at a meeting of the Supreme Medical Council on 23 February 1922, Dr Bogomil Beron,¹⁰⁹ honorary head of the Bulgarian Dermatological Association, had also raised the idea of reforming legislation in favor of women. Already as a participant at the conference of the East European Red Cross Organizations in Prague in 5–10 December 1921, he had fully approved of its decision to work for the introduction of legal provisions to protect women and girls against men’s sexual misdeeds. Beron identified a direct link between legal deficiencies, the spread of prostitution, and the increase of venereal disease in Bulgaria after World War I, and concluded that the absence of proper legal defenses, alongside notoriously hard economic and social conditions, had turned women into an easy prey for men’s lust.¹¹⁰

Based on the report of the forensic doctor (and later member of the Pro-natalist Bill Commission in 1939) Ivan Moskov at the Fourth Scientific Meeting of Bulgarian Lawyers on 15 December 1933, Zlatarski made clear that the progress of modern medicine excluded any attempts by ill-intended women at blackmailing respectable family heads.¹¹¹ The protection of a child born outside wedlock did not contradict public morals. On the contrary, the

¹⁰⁷ Kozhukharov did not provide further evidence about Vladimirov.

¹⁰⁸ L.E. Vladimirov, *Advocatus miles*, p. 20, cited in Kozhukharov, “In search for the father,” p.81.

¹⁰⁹ Dr Bogomil Beron (1866–1936): trained in medicine (Vienna, Paris, and Berlin); founder of the Department and the Clinic for Dermatological and Venereal Diseases at the Medical Faculty of Sofia University, and of Bulgaria’s first venereal dispensary. For further details on him, see *Entsiklopediia Bŭlgariia* [Encyclopedia Bulgaria], I (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1978), p. 269.

¹¹⁰ Bogomil Beron. “Doklad” [Report], *State Gazette*, No. 1 (1922), pp. 5–8, here p. 5.

¹¹¹ Zlatarski, “Searching for the father,” p. 384.

new social morals themselves demanded a legal change in favor of unfortunate mothers.¹¹² If the law permitted the search for the mother, it had equally to allow for the search for the father. If a mother was obliged to care for and support her child, the father, too, had to be compelled to do so.¹¹³

Increasing mortality rates among illegitimate infants, as well as the discrepancy between the numbers of still-born children outside and inside wedlock, further motivated lawyers in the 1920s to press for the amendment of article 10. The mortality rate of children born outside marriage had been shown to be rising significantly: from a ratio of 14.27 vs. 20.20 (legitimates to illegitimates) in 1898, to 14.24 vs. 25.92 in 1902, respectively. The statistics on crime rates, as published by the Statistical Office, also indicated that rates of still-born babies outside marriage were from four to six times higher than those of still births in marriage. These were considered to clearly mask attempted abortions, which, in practice, according to Nedelkov had always been difficult to prove.¹¹⁴

Alongside their outcry for legal reform, some Bulgarian legislators also hinted at a need to break with the traditional double-standard sexual morality, which, though disapproving of premarital sexual relations in general, would nevertheless excuse a man's misdemeanor as part of his male nature. In Zlatarski's reasoning, the same sexual norms had to apply to both sexes, and what was unacceptable for women had to become equally unacceptable for men.¹¹⁵

The propagation of a uniform sexual code for both sexes, however, did not imply a radically softer legal attitude towards the unwed mother. Indeed, amending the law was recognized as necessary as far as it would provide for the illegitimate child and thus reaffirm social security. Yet, there was also the demand to guarantee the esteem of marriage and the family, and Zlatarski underlined that an amendment to the law should not go beyond the unlimited search for the father. He acknowledged that there were two different approaches in European law towards the issue of paternity suits, yet, while recommending the tendencies which the Bulgarian legislators

¹¹² Ibid., p. 385.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 383.

¹¹⁴ Nedelkov, *Kriminalna statistika* [Crime statistics], pp. 31, 181, cited in Kozhukharov, "In search for the father," p. 95.

¹¹⁵ Zlatarski, "Searching for the father," p. 383.

ought to follow, Zlatarski ruled out the modern arrangements of German and Swiss legislation as incompatible with Bulgarian reality. He actually re-echoed the fears of the drafters of the Code Napoleon in 1804: *chantage* and public dishonor could be intentionally inflicted upon a respectable *paterfamilias* once the freedom of German and Swiss law to identify the father was granted. The general Bulgarian public consciousness was far below the culturally elevated level of Swiss and German society, he argued, and would hardly accept a legally unobstructed search. "It would be dangerous to go to the other extreme and pass from a system of absolute prohibition to an unrestricted system of paternity search. This will greatly disturb the equilibrium of people's legal and moral views, and hence, any radical change of such nature is not recommended."¹¹⁶

In Zlatarski's opinion, Bulgarian legislators ought to adopt a middle way, which would let them enforce the restrictions of the French article 340 in a limited search for the father (except for designated cases), while simultaneously enacting the efficient protection of the child as enshrined in Swiss and German legislation. Thus the rights of both parties would be ensured, while the interests of the state and the society would also be secured:

...the man will be shielded from infamous suits, whereas the child outside wedlock and his mother will be materially supported and socially defended without putting the public respect for the institution of marriage and the family at stake. This solution will satisfy the sense of morality and provide firmer legal and social security.¹¹⁷

MOTHERS' RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

The Bulgarian Women's Union, too, represented by its chairwoman, Mrs Dimitrana Ivanova—a lawyer herself¹¹⁸—manifested interest in the severe discrimination in Bulgarian law against children born outside marriage and their misfortunate mothers. Ivanova voiced her concern in the context of women's internationally subordinate social position and their fight for the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 401.

¹¹⁸ Dimitrana Ivanova, née Petrova (1881–1960), teacher, lawyer, journalist, prominent feminist, and long-term chairwoman of the Bulgarian Women's Union (1926–1944); member of the Board of the International

vote and for equal political rights. Much of her concern followed the initiatives of the International Council of Women and the International Women's Union for Equal Rights in the field of social hygiene, and their fight against debauchery, sexual hypocrisy and prostitution. As early as 1920, at the International Women's Council Congress in Norway, 8–18 September, and at the Eighth Congress of the Women's Union for Equal Rights in Geneva (restated at their Ninth Congress in Rome, 12–19 May 1923), the two international organizations had appealed to its membership to work for the formal recognition of the "illegitimate" child in national law. They had demanded the worldwide abolition of dual standards towards children, calling for the recognition of all children's right to their father's name and to maintenance from him.¹¹⁹ Since 1923, women's struggle for paternity suit was more broadly contextualized within the framework of motherhood as a socially useful category, and placed alongside demands for mothers' rights to social insurance and social (allowance) support.

The Bulgarian Women's Union wholeheartedly sided with the international petition.¹²⁰ Its chairwoman publicized case studies to illustrate the ridiculous, double-standard attitude of Bulgarian law towards children born outside wedlock,¹²¹ and regularly updated her readers with the latest legal initiatives in the international field to amend national laws in favor of unwed mothers, and establish their right to paternity suits.¹²² In April 1924, the *Women's Voice* optimistically informed its readers about a new Bulgar-

Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (1935–1940); editor of the newspaper of the Bulgarian Women's Union, *Women's Voice*. Ivanova is considered the representative ideologist of Bulgarian "bourgeois" feminism in the pre-1944 era. For further details, see Krassimira Daskalova, "Dimitrana Ivanova," in Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loufti, *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms. Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries* (Budapest—New York: CEU Press: 2006), pp. 183–184; idem, "The Women's movement in Bulgaria in a life story," *Women's History Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2004), pp. 91–102.

¹¹⁹ Dimitrana Ivanova, "Resoliutsiite na kongresa na mezhdunarodnia zhenski süiuz" [Resolutions of the congress of the International Council of Women], *Women's Voice*, No. 7 (1920), pp. 2–3; "Südbata na nezakonnite detsa" [The plight of illegitimate children], *Women's Voice*, No. 12 (15 April 1923), pp. 2–3; *Women's Voice*, No. 18 (10 June 1923), pp. 1–3; "Resoliutsiite na rimskii mezhdunaroden kongres za izbornite prava na zhenite" [Resolutions of the international congress in Rome, regarding women's suffrage rights], No. 19–20 (15 July 1923), pp. 2–3.

¹²⁰ "Resoliutsii na XVII- tiia kongres na Bülgarskiiia Zhenski Süiuz, 23–25 septemvri 1923 v Ruse" [Resolutions of the 17th congress of the Bulgarian Women's Union in Ruse, 23–25 September 1923], *Women's Voice*, No. 1–2 (20 October 1923), pp. 6–7.

¹²¹ Dimitrana Ivanova, "Devetia kongres na mezhdunarodniia zhenski süiuz za ravni prava" [The ninth congress of the International Women Union for Equal Rights], *Women's Voice*, No. 16–17 (15 May 1923), p. 1.

¹²² *Women's Voice*, "Vünshna khronika" [International survey], No. 16–17 (15 May 1923), p. 7; *Women's Voice*, "Vünshna khronika" [International survey], No. 14–15 (20 April 1920), p. 6.

ian Bill guaranteeing an unwed mother's right to sue the putative father and ensure financial support for her illegitimate child.¹²³

REFORM BILLS (1924–1933)

The first crucial break with the old 1890 law was Professor Simeon Angelov's Bill for Children Born Outside Wedlock and Their Avowal, and for Adoption, drafted in 1924. It became the foundation of the subsequent 1932/33 bill of the Codification Commission, and also of the final law, which was voted by the National Assembly in November 1940. The history, definitions, and ideology behind Angelov's bill and the eventual law help demonstrate the motives of the politicians and legislators, but also the shift in ideology during the 1920s and 1930s.

The bill's drafter, Simeon Angelov (1881–1925), was a member of the Codification Commission at the Ministry of Justice from 1915 to 1925, and professor of Roman law at Sofia University. He had obtained his first degree, and subsequently his PhD, in Germany at the Universities of Jena, Berlin, and Tübingen, and had later specialized in the philosophy of law and in civil law in Halle and Berlin, and in Paris and Rome from 1908 to 1910.¹²⁴ This gave him in-depth knowledge of the German *Bürgerliches Rechtsgesetzbuch* [Civil law] and its treatment of children born outside marriage, but also made him a contemporary and a witness of the struggle of the French deputies Gustave Rivet and Berenger to amend the infamous article 340 in the Code Napoleon.

Angelov combined his political ideology with what his contemporaries later described as a concerned, humane, even "rather sentimental attitude"¹²⁵ towards social outcasts. Due to his high public and professional position, the bill adopted by the Codification Commission was substantially his work. Yet, after his untimely death the bill was dropped; it never entered the National Assembly in the 1920s, and thus it failed to become law.

The major motive of Angelov's Bill was the necessity to reform the legal position of children born outside wedlock and to improve their status. In doing so, he admitted that, "like the rest of Bulgarian civil laws, this bill, too,

¹²³ "Bashtata shte se türsi" [The father will be searched for], *Women's Voice*, No. 13 (1 April 1924), p. 3.

¹²⁴ For further details on Simeon Angelov, see *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, I, (1978), p. 76.

¹²⁵ Speech of Georgi Todorov, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, II RS, 8 M* (12 November 1940), p. 168.

is not an authentic Bulgarian creation but has been borrowed from the legislation of other countries.” Unlike most Bulgarian laws, however, which were mere translations of their international source and rarely bore intentional deviations from the original, Angelov claimed to have remodelled his bill completely, primarily on the basis of Swiss law, “the best modern piece of legislation,” though in certain parts he had also resorted to the German and French laws. Thus he had deliberately departed from any single pattern, in order to adjust his project fully to the prevailing conditions of Bulgarian society.¹²⁶

Angelov justified his approach by reference to the legal shortcomings of magistrates who had largely failed to implement modern, indigenously-drafted Bulgarian laws in their practice. He sided with the founding fathers of the Bulgarian constitution in 1878 and the later generations of Bulgarian legislators, who had adopted the best pieces of foreign legislation for different fields of Bulgarian social life. “We need to learn from other more experienced and culturally advanced nations, and will hardly find better arrangements of certain issues than other nations have provided,” he claimed.¹²⁷ By adjusting other countries’ legislation to Bulgarian society, the work of the courts would be greatly facilitated.¹²⁸

Angelov acknowledged that family law was a sensitive issue which had to take full consideration of the everyday customary practice of the people. Yet, a legislator’s task was also to channel people’s views and perceptions in the objectively correct direction towards which a society had to develop. Legal novelties and introductions were justified by ethical, political, and socio-political considerations. In the case of the proposed Bill for Children outside Wedlock, however, it was the ethical side which was of primary importance. Hence, part of the law’s objectives was to challenge and transform traditionally conservative Bulgarian attitudes towards this particular category of children.¹²⁹

Angelov did not explain whose moral principles the Bulgarian public was supposed to live up to. His reasoning, however, indicated that Europeanization, understood as modernization was the essential force of inspiration. Moralizing accusations of unwed mothers (“she should have watched

¹²⁶ Simeon Angelov, “Po zakonoproekta za izvünbrachnite detsa, za uzakoniavaneto im i za usinoviavaneto” [On the bill for the avowal of children born outside wedlock and their legitimization, and for adoption], *Iuridicheska Misul* [Juridical thought], No. 6–7 (July 1924), pp. 117–139, here pp. 117–118.

¹²⁷ Angelov, “On the Bill for the Avowal of Children Born Outside Wedlock,” pp. 117–118

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 118–119.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

out and kept her skirts tight”) were allegedly common in some social layers, Angelov admitted. These, however, ran counter the modern belief that blood relations between father and child should not be ignored. The least that a father could do was to assume responsibility for the support and upbringing of his child. In Angelov’s view, this was the proper standpoint, which the legislators had to adopt.

It was from the point of the child’s rights that Angelov questioned the very term “illegitimate” as recorded and used by the 1890 Bulgarian law. It was a literal translation from Russian, but it had outlasted its value. The idea behind it signified a person completely devoid of civil rights, i.e., an outlaw. Hence, its use could only be justified in societies in which children born outside marriage were deprived of family, inheritance, and citizen’s rights. The very act of birth, however, was not a legal but a biological category, and was identical for everyone. Birth in itself could not follow or contradict the law. The phrase “born outside wedlock” was suggested as the correct legal substitute for “illegitimate,” the more so as it had become a recognized and widely used expression in most modern legislations.¹³⁰

Alongside the change in terminology, Angelov introduced several essential innovations, which aimed at advancing the child’s position in its family and in society. The 1890 law had failed to provide a definition for children born outside marriage, and this was only elaborated later, in the December 1907 Civil Law. Angelov incorporated the latter’s definition in his bill. This codified, as being “out of wedlock,” those born by single (never married) women, by divorcees or widows more than 300 days after the termination of their marriage either by divorce or by the death of the husband (unless it was proved that the child was conceived during marriage), and by married women, whose children were refused acknowledgement by the husband as his own upon legal proof.¹³¹

Secondly, countering the rather loose regulations of the 1907 law, Angelov’s Bill claimed that children born in an annulled marriage retained their legitimate and, hence, legal status.¹³² The amendment followed, according to Angelov, the modern French, Italian, German, Austrian, and, particularly, Swiss law, and was in conformity with the provisions of the Bulgarian

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 120.

¹³¹ Angelov, article 1, chapter I, in “Bill for the Avowal of Children Born Outside Wedlock,” pp. 121, 198.

¹³² Ibid., article 2, , pp. 119–120, 198.

Exarchate Statute. The trend of all European legislation was to improve the legal position of the vulnerable child. The child should not bear the severe consequences of a legal union, which, later, was reclassified as concubinage. While such unfortunate matrimonial incidents inflicted emotional turmoil on the partners, their social standing was less affected than that of the child, whose status, according to the 1890 legal practice in Bulgaria, was degraded to “illegitimacy,” which deprived it of its inheritance rights.¹³³

Thirdly, another important step was taken to enhance the illegitimate child’s legal status. A child born outside marriage was to be acknowledged as having all legitimate expectations towards the mother and her kin as a “regular” child. The same provision applied to its right to inherit from her and from her family. The child’s legitimate status towards its mother was not subject to acknowledgement or legal proof (as had been demanded by the 1890 law) but was determined by the act of birth itself. Nature itself, Angelov argued, had placed the child closer to the mother than to the father; a mother’s love and care for her child was, by nature, not affected by its legal status.¹³⁴ The natural bond between mother and child had to be legally expanded to include the mother’s kin, as usually it was the mother’s family which provided the shelter and the environment for the child outside wedlock to grow up in. It was in the interest of the child to be a legally fully recognized member of its mother’s kin, especially in the case of the mother’s early death or inability to assure the child of support. This, in Angelov’s view, would ensure a “truly humane treatment of children born outside wedlock and would prevent their neglect.”¹³⁵

Angelov’s last proposal ran counter to the 1890 law, which had followed the French *Code Civil* and had denied the child’s protection within the mother’s family, in order to shield the latter from social disgrace. These considerations, according to Angelov, had become void of sense over time:

Indeed, it could be that even today the unwed mother’s kin will frown upon her child and will only reluctantly treat it as legitimate. However, this should not restrain the legislator from providing in accordance with the rules of nature, and codifying what is fair and socially required.¹³⁶

¹³³ Ibid., p.123.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.132.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.133.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

It was once again because of considerations of the perceived natural bond between mother and child that Angelov's Bill justified assistance for the child born from an adulterous or incestuous relationship.¹³⁷ Previously Bulgarian law had ruled out a child's acknowledgement, legitimization, or adoption by its biological parents, and had denied it any family status and inheritance rights. An adulterine or incestuous child was no one's offspring and could claim subsistence only.¹³⁸ Yet, there were no good moral grounds, in Angelov's words, to differentiate between sexually legitimate and *ex damnato coitu* (i.e., adulterous or incestuous) categories of children born out of marriage, and hence, to give them a different legal treatment. "All children born outside marriage require identical legal protection; they all need to have their family and inheritance rights from their parents secured. It is neither fair nor sensible to single out one category for special punishment for their parents' violations,"¹³⁹ Angelov concluded.

Finally, Angelov delegated to the unwed woman the right to search for the father before and after her child's birth, and transferred the same right to the child for one year after its legal maturity. The latter provision was justified in case of inheritance rights, which the unrecognized child, for various reasons, could claim from its father later. Yet Angelov introduced a clear distinction between the inheritance rights of children if freely avowed by their father, and those which were enacted upon a court's decision. Whereas in the first case the child was treated as a legitimate heir of both the father and his kin, and thus as an equal to the father's legitimate offspring, in the second case the child outside wedlock could claim inheritance rights from the father only.

The unwed mother's sexual partner was likely to be recognized as fathering her child if the woman could prove cohabitation or intercourse with him during a period of 180 up to 300 days after conception—an assumption borrowed by Angelov from the provisions of the German and Swiss civil law. However, men were granted the right to all evidence in order to repudiate a paternity claim—a position which was upheld by legal systems in which parenthood was established based on blood kinship, and which the Bulgarian bill was also claimed to follow. This approach included in

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 125.

¹³⁸ Article 52 of the Inheritance Law, *ibid.*, p. 131.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 131.

particular, in article 13, a man's right to accuse a woman of *exceptio plurium concumbentium* (or *construpratorum*), i.e., having had intercourse with more than one sexual partner during the critical period. Angelov admitted that these provisions could largely be misused in favor of irresponsible men and for the disgrace of women, as any false witness could be employed to testify alleged sexual wantonness on the woman's part and thus deprive the child of support.¹⁴⁰ However, they were supposed to prevent less honest women from resorting to scheming mechanisms in order to entrap a wealthy lover as a father of their illegitimate child.¹⁴¹

According to the amended article 340 of the French 1912 law, any paternity suit had to be rejected if the woman was proved to have had indulged in prostitution (*inconduite*, according to the French term, or *unzüchtiger Lebenswandel*, in German). A wanton lifestyle on the part of the mother of a child earlier born out of marriage was not enough, however, to refuse her the right to search for the father.¹⁴²

Once his paternity was acknowledged in court, a man became legally charged with the responsibility to maintain, raise and educate the child.¹⁴³ The costs were to be fixed according to the father's social position (in contrast to the German law, which determined the expenses in accordance to the mother's social status). This would avoid the financial ruin of the man if his status in society were lower than the woman's. A woman could also claim compensations for her childbirth expenses in the interval of six weeks before and six weeks after the delivery. According to Angelov's bill, she was entitled to claim reimbursement even if the delivery had resulted in stillbirth or the infant had died later.¹⁴⁴

With few modifications, Angelov's provisions of 1924 were repeated in the 1932/33 bill of the Codification Commission, the enactment of which was only prevented by other more urgent legislative demands at that time.¹⁴⁵ It was this bill which finally received codification in 1940, when under the pressure of Mitakov, Minister of Justice, it was finally placed before the National Assembly.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁴³ Article 16, *ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁴⁴ Article 19, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Mitakov, "A project for a new Law for Children Born Outside Wedlock," p. 134.

ILLEGITIMACY AND MEDIA RESPONSE

The public and media forums of the 1930s and early 1940s manifested little interest in the plight of either single mothers or children outside wedlock. To be sure, an Italian film, *La Peccatrice* [The sinner], starring Paola Barbara, was released on the Bulgarian screen in March 1941, a few months after the codification of the Law for Children Outside Wedlock in Parliament. It portrayed the unwed mother as an innocent victim of seduction, torn between her “maternal feelings, which bordered on a cult towards her beloved child,” and public prejudice. The popular tabloid *Morning*, which published the review, sympathetically commented on the image of the maiden-mother as a woman “scorned by women, while desired and hunted by men, sentenced by society and deprived of happiness by life, who struggled through the worst and greatest drama of the eternal woman.”¹⁴⁶ Could an unwed mother be a sinner if she steadily carried her burden but was nevertheless pushed by society to find her last resort on the street, exclaimed *Morning*, which also informed its readers that the board of *Bulgaria Picture House* had invited the Italian lead-actress to attend the first night in Bulgaria of “this widely discussed social film.”¹⁴⁷

Such media coverage was, however, exceptional, and restricted to tabloids, and should be viewed in the light of the newly-signed Treaty for Cultural Cooperation between Bulgaria and Italy in 1940.¹⁴⁸ Overall, Bulgarian mass media, and in particular the relevant journals of the Women’s Union, the Department for Public Assistance at the Ministry of Interior, and the national Union for Child Protection, were far from quick to treat the subject of illegitimacy. Since its first editions in 1935, *Public Assistance* had dedicated just two articles to the issue of birth outside marriage,¹⁴⁹ the publica-

¹⁴⁶ “*Greshmitsata: edin film-otkrovenie*” [The sinner: a film-confession], *Utro* [Morning], No. 9477 (1 March 1941), p. 7.

¹⁴⁷ *Morning*, No. 9478 (2 March 1941), pp. 2, 7.

¹⁴⁸ Nikolai Poppetrov, “Opiti za dirizhirane na kulturata v Bŭlgariia (1934–1944)” [Attempts to channel culture in Bulgaria (1934–1944)], in Iskra Baeva (ed.), *Moderna Bŭlgariia: Sbornik Istoricheski Izsledvania v Chest na 65-Godishninata na Profesor Dr Velichko Georgiev i Akademik Ilcho Dimitrov* [Modern Bulgaria: A collection of historical studies in honor of the sixty-fifth anniversary of Professor Dr Velichko Georgiev and Academician Ilcho Dimitrov] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv Kliment Okhridski,” 1999), pp. 182–202, here p. 188.

¹⁴⁹ “Obshtinskite detski iasli “Kniaginia Maria Luisa” v Plovdiv” [The municipal crèche “Princess Maria Luisa” in Plovdiv], *Public Assistance*, No. 3–4 (15–29 February 1936), pp. 58–59; Detelinov, “Poseshtenie v sofiskite detski iasli na ulitsa Pirov” [A visit to the Sofia crèche in Pirov street], *Public Assistance*, No. 9–10 (15–31 May 1936), p. 231.

tion of which have been inspired by the rise of a wave of legal interest in the problem.¹⁵⁰ In their essence, these articles presented short case studies on the Plovdiv and Sofia crèches, which shed light on the social and family background of the children in care there, elaborating on the financial problems which accompanied their upbringing and providing some insight into the structural organization of these institutions. The organization of the latter was reminiscent of Italian maternity homes for children born outside wedlock, where unwed mothers were expected to leave their illegitimate child and serve as wetnurses to the infants in care. In contrast to Italian mothers, however, Bulgarian single mothers were allowed to breastfeed their own baby alongside the other sucklings whom they had charge of. Detelinov, an occasional writer to *Public Assistance* who had visited the Sofia crèche to assist a friend of his in adopting a baby boy, explained that unmarried mothers were obliged to breastfeed for six months in the crèche in order to have their babies accepted, and were expected to contribute financially to their institutional support until their children's adoption. While wetnursing was predominantly left to unmarried mothers, poor, breastfeeding "regular" mothers might also be employed.¹⁵¹

According to the journalistic accounts, both crèches housed children with diverse family histories and were not solely designed to address the problem of illegitimacy. Thus, in the Plovdiv case, it was stated that out of 107 children in 1935, 38 had been foundlings, 33 had been born illegitimate, 13 were orphans and the other 23 had been left in care because of family problems or their parents' poor health. Only ten children had their expenses covered partly by their families, whereas the rest (97 out of 107) had been left to rely entirely on municipality support.¹⁵² The children were said to be in good health, an achievement which was due to the combined efforts of three full-time qualified nurses and thirty-nine wetnurses. Detelinov sympathetically described the tragedy of these "poorly clad girls," whom he qualified as victims of "professional seducers." The regulations in the crèches, Detelinov complained, forbade unmarried mothers to be given details about the adoptive parents, thus pushing them into emotional trag-

¹⁵⁰ For instance, see V. Mitakov's article in *Legal Thought*, approximately at the same time in 1936.

¹⁵¹ "The municipal crèche 'Princess Maria Luisa,'" p. 58; Detelinov, "A visit to the Sofia crèche," p. 231.

¹⁵² "The municipal crèche 'Princess Maria Luisa,'" p. 58.

edy for the rest of their lives. Yet the law foresaw no penalty against the dastardly fathers who had forced girls into ruin.¹⁵³

Our Child, the publication of the national Union for Child Protection, was less eloquent on the problem. In April 1940, it published a paper presented by Professor Dr N. Dolapchiev to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences on “The legal status of Bulgarian children,”¹⁵⁴ where the issue of children born outside wedlock was covered alongside other urgent topics related to children in general, such as abortion, parental rights, and social policies towards child labor and juvenile crime. Although illegitimacy was in the forefront of Dolapchiev’s paper, the author presented a strictly legal overview and avoided any personal comments.

Dimitrana Ivanova, too, was brief in her comments on the Bill and, later, on the Law for Children Born Outside Wedlock. Yet she addressed any legal restrictions on the search for the father as “unjust” and qualified the inheritance provisions for illegitimate children as “unequal.”¹⁵⁵

THE LEGAL BREAKTHROUGH (NOVEMBER 1940)

The final Law for Children Born Outside Wedlock and Their Avowal acknowledged the right of children born outside marriage to inheritance and support from their biological parents and established their position in their family (though only partly in respect of their father). Significantly, fathers of illegitimate offspring were given the right to adopt their child born outside wedlock with the consent of the unwed mother and of the child itself (once at and over fourteen),¹⁵⁶ and thus pass over his name and inheritance to it. These provisions, however, could be severely restricted or rendered inapplicable if the father had living parents and a legitimate wife and heir. In that case (Art. 35), his legitimate family’s consent was crucial for the adoption; moreover, the existence of a legitimate heir excluded

¹⁵³ Detelinov, “A visit to the Sofia crèche,” p. 231.

¹⁵⁴ N. Dolapchiev, “Zakonodatelnoto polozhenie na nasheto dete” [The legal status of our child], *Nasheto Dete* [Our child], No. 4 (April 1940), pp. 3–24.

¹⁵⁵ Dimitrana Ivanova, “Novite zakonoproekti” [The new bills], *Women’s Voice*, No. 1–2 (20 November 1940), pp. 1–2; “Zakonüt za Izvünbrachnite Detsa i za Osinoviavaneto” [The law for children born outside wedlock and for adoption], *Women’s Voice*, No. 3–4 (5 December 1940), p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ *Zakon za Izvünbrachnite Detsa i za Osinoviavaneto* [The law for children born outside wedlock and for adoption] (Sofia, 1940), p. 19.

any adoption possibilities.¹⁵⁷ Clearly, the law favored marriage and family offspring and differentiated between legitimate and illegitimate offspring, albeit acknowledging blood kinship between child and parent.

Both the 1932/33 bill and the subsequent 1940 law restricted the unwed mother's claims for assistance, which was in full accord with the deputies' and the Bulgarian public's attitudes towards illegitimacy in general. Thus the 1925 provisions for a six-week period of material support for the unwed mother by the father both before and after confinement, were reduced by the 1932/33 bill and codified in the 1940 law as a six-week relief after confinement only. Similarly, the 1932/33 modification and the final 1940 law dropped a woman's chance to claim financial reimbursement in the case of an earlier marriage promise or sexual misuse and rape. The 1932/33 bill and the 1940 law, however, strengthened the unwed mother's legal rights over her child and, in contrast to ongoing contemporary discussions in Germany,¹⁵⁸ required her consent if the child was to be given out for adoption.

Yet, contrary to the Italian law for illegitimate children, neither the two bills nor the subsequent law placed any responsibility for the support of unwed mothers and children outside wedlock upon the state or the municipalities, confining their attention to the mother's income (if any), and—most significantly—exposing her completely to the mercy of her family.

The preamble to the 1940 bill as well as the deputies' comments manifested the newly- adopted state approach to guaranteeing the biological existence and financial support of all children, regardless of their origin. It was acknowledged that "a child cannot be deprived of means of life support because of a sin it was not to be blamed for."¹⁵⁹ The Bulgarian version of the Napoleonic Code of 1890 entirely sacrificed the illegitimate child in the name of family peace, thus legally encouraging the callous father to neglect his child and completely deny it the means of subsistence.¹⁶⁰ By protecting the father, the old law was not reducing but further encouraging births outside matrimony, a phenomenon which the new Bulgarian authorities felt obliged to combat.

¹⁵⁷ *The Law for Children Born Outside Wedlock*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁸ See Himmler's Bill for illegitimate children, which attempted to impose a father's claims to his illegitimate child and to his adoption even counter to the mother's will. The attempt, however, was rejected by Hitler himself. For further details, see Georg Lilienthal, "The illegitimacy question in Germany 1900–1945: Areas of tension in social and population policy," *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 5, No.2 (1990), pp. 249–281, here p. 270.

¹⁵⁹ *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, II RS, 8 M (12 November 1940)*, p. 162.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

The preamble and comments on the law revealed that Bulgarian legislators perceived births outside marriage as running counter to the “normal” flow of life. The 1940 law was stated to be a product of “the abnormal time” in which Bulgaria was enmeshed and which, in the perspective of the looming war threat, required quick legislative intervention on the part of the state. It was stressed that “in normal times, this bill would have provoked an uproar amongst legislators” and emphasized that great courage was needed on the part of certain ministers to support the bill. In their essence, it was being claimed that neither society nor its laws could tolerate behavior that was contrary to proper norms and proper state organization. Down-to-earth observations like these of Zhiko Strundzhev, a national deputy who related the spread of illegitimacy in the countryside to the combination of mounting poverty, traditionally expensive wedding practices, and illegally high marriage fees imposed by corrupt clergymen, were left outside consideration. Instead, the parliamentary minutes record some cynical remarks on the deputies’ part, which drew a direct link between illegitimate children and maternal promiscuity in the popular mind.¹⁶¹

The law showed little favor to children born outside marriage, and the restricted rights of the mother to search for the father were seen as a warranty to safeguard the “regular” family. In his speech, Minister Mitakov, otherwise well-known for his reform ideas in the legal sphere, underlined that although the liberal regulations of countries such as Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Switzerland, the Soviet Union, and those of Scandinavian countries seemed theoretically more favorable towards the mother and her child, Bulgaria preferred to adopt the restrictive approach of France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, and Holland. This would help avoid legal mistakes and spare respectable *paterfamilias* from false accusations of fathering illegitimate offspring.¹⁶² The eventual law bore the signs of a punitive measure against social “sinners,” and it was hoped that it would cleanse the collective and sustain its moral purity and proper order.

¹⁶¹ See Georgi Todorov’s remark: “Indeed, it is only the mother who can testify whether her child was conceived by A or B. This, however, does not imply that she would know who the father is. It depends on how many spoons have entered the soup.” Todorov’s “joke” was acknowledged by an outburst of laughter. For further details see *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, II RS, 8 M* (12 November 1940), p. 169.

¹⁶² Vasil Mitakov, “Motivi kŭm Zakona za Izvŭnbrachnite Detsa i za Osinoviavaneto” [Preamble to the law for children born outside wedlock and for adoption], *ibid.*, p. 165.

CHAPTER III

Demography, Media Representations, and Parliamentary Discourse



In the late 1930s, the notion that the country was suffering from a “spiritual crisis” infiltrated Bulgarian public space, imbuing it with the ultra-nationalistic and fascist ideology of neo-traditionalism.¹ External, and especially international factors, such as Marxist, bolshevist, pacifist, or cosmopolitan influences, were blamed for the alleged cultural disintegration. Appeals were raised to resist the encroachment of the “superficial, ultramodern” and “dying” Western civilization, which was threatening to “demolish the moral foundations and family virtues” of Bulgarian society. The “random, aimless copying of alien cultures” had to be rejected in favor of a distinct Bulgarian, *Volk* culture, reflecting the nation’s glorious traditions, ideals, and virtues. A unique, mythic Bulgarian past, both in a Balkan and in a broader European context, became a common media topic. Yet, as is argued by historians Poppetrov and Migevev, this never became a form of fanaticism, either nationalistic or religious.²

The “revival” of what was imagined to be the traditional Bulgarian family became a heated topic of debate. Women’s social role became a topic of public discussion, and adherents to the right-wing, conservative doctrine defined biological reproduction and motherhood, enshrined in the realm of the domestic sphere, as a woman’s foremost national duty. The “rediscovery” of (neo-)traditionalistic values endowed the family with special strength and value. It was hoped that its intrinsic worth would empower the collective and reverse the negative fertility trend. Yet, the increasing

¹ Daskalova, “Bulgarian women in movement, laws, discourses (1840s–1940s)”, pp. 180–196.

² Vladimir Migevev, *Utvürzhdavane na Monarcho-fashistkata Diktatura v Bŭlgaria 1934–1936* [The consolidation of monarcho-fascism in Bulgaria 1934–1936] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1977), p. 48; Poppetrov, “Attempts to channel culture in Bulgaria (1934–1944)”, pp. 182–202.

emphasis on the plummeting birth rate was also an appeal to the state to intervene and lay the foundations of a welfare system to support child-rich parents and assist the population to raise their progeny.

1. The “discovery” of birth decline

In 1928 *Narodno Zdrave* [People’s health], a popular medical magazine, published an article by its Editor-in-Chief, Dr D. Burilkov, stating that “there is no danger of depopulation in Bulgaria. On the contrary, Bulgaria suffers from rapid population growth.”³ Dr Burilkov’s logic was based on his observation that the rate of population growth had increased from 17.1 per thousand in the post-Liberation period of 1888–90 to 18.2 per thousand in the post-wars era of 1921–25. Likewise, in his work *The Population of Bulgaria*,⁴ published in 1935 but predominantly based on data related to the period before 1926, Zheko Chankov emphasized that although the wars had significantly reduced the percentage of the population in the child-age groups, by the mid-1920s the population had undergone a rapid increase.

The growth tendency was most pronounced in the rural areas, where the birth rates even exceeded their pre-war levels. Bulgaria’s population was young: the age-group 0–19 was dominant and, after the European part of Russia, proportionally the highest in Europe.⁵

Yet by the mid-1930s, the demographic figures had changed unfavorably, and the social response changed with it.

The first signs of an ideological reconsideration of the significance of the birth rates in Bulgaria, and a consequent new approach towards families, and above all large families, appeared in the editorial of the *People’s Health*, the newspaper of the Association for People’s Health, which was attached

³ *Narodno Zdrave* [People’s health], No. 3 (15 October 1928), p. 21.

⁴ Zheko Chankov, *Naselenieto na Bŭlgariia* [The population of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Knigoizdatelstvo “Kaznŭlŭshka Dolina,” 1935). Chankov’s work was less an original study than a concise compilation of more or less current data on the demography of Bulgaria. Yet, a favorable introduction to his monograph was written by none other than Professor Dimitŭr Mishaikov, head of the Department of Theoretical Statistics at Sofia University (1924–1944) and chair of the Supreme Council of Statistics in Bulgaria (1928–1944). Chankov incorporated in his book much evidence and numerous conclusions from Mishaikov’s demographic studies.

⁵ *Ibid.* In so concluding, Chankov did not take under consideration the high figures for Romania, probably because they referred to the pre-war period.

Table 4.1 Distribution of population in different age-groups per 1000 population⁶

Country	0–19		20–59		60 and over	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Austria (1923)	174	173	261	291	46	55
Belgium (1920)	175	173	271	279	46	56
Bulgaria (1926)	235	225	225	234	41	40
England & Wales (1921)	185	184	250	286	42	53
Germany (1905)	183	179	259	287	42	50
Greece (1928)	222	212	232	245	43	46
Denmark (1921)	201	203	235	255	47	56
Spain (1920)	219	222	229	250	37	43
Italy (1921)	209	202	233	252	31	53
Norway (1920)	215	207	223	245	49	61
Romania (1912)	469	969	223	233	75	75
European part of Russia (1926)	242	248	205	238	29	38
Hungary (1920)	206	206	235	263	44	46
France (1926)	156	154	262	390	61	77
Netherlands (1920)	215	209	240	248	42	46
Czechoslovakia (1921)	202	200	238	267	42	51
Switzerland (1920)	190	189	252	276	41	52
Sweden (1925)	188	180	264	280	39	49

to the General Directorate of People's Health.⁷ In 1937 the paper organized a contest for large, child-rich families, who were invited to send pictures of their children for publication. Seven families with eight to ten children were awarded the substantial sum of 1000 leva (equal to the amount a typical peasant family would spend on heating in 1935–1936).⁸ In 1938, the contest was repeated under the slogan “Bulgaria's invincible glory is in her large families. Support large, *mnogodetni* families!”⁹ and the award for the participants was raised to 1500 leva.¹⁰ In 1939, the Editor-in-Chief

⁶ Chankov, *The Population of Bulgaria*, p. 163.

⁷ Note that T. Burilokov's magazine, *People's Health*, and the newspaper of the Association for People's Health were different publications, despite their identical titles.

⁸ For further details, see Khristina Mocheva's study “Bŭlgarskoto selsko domakinstvo” [The Bulgarian peasant household], *Izvestia na Bŭlgarskoto Drŭzhestvo za Sotsialen Napredŭk* [Bulletin of the Bulgarian Association for Social Progress], No. 4 (1939), 2–12, p. 3.

⁹ “Bŭlgaria krie nesŭkrushima slava v svoeto mnogodetstvo. Pokrovitelstvo na mnogodetnite semeistva” [Bulgaria's invincible glory is in her large families. Support large, *mnogodetni* families], *Narodno Zdrave* [People's Health], No. 13–14 (1938), p. 1.

¹⁰ “Belezhki na redaktora: za mnogodetnite” [Editor's notes: On large, *mnogodetni* families], *People's Health*, No. 22–23 (1 July 1939), p. 15.

Zakhari Zakhariiev explained this step as an aspect of the intention of the Association for People's Health to provoke public and political awareness of "an important issue, whose solution has been forced upon us for societal and state reasons."¹¹ The financial awards of the contest were of secondary importance; the aim was to stir general concern over the problem of birth rates and the needs of large families.¹² Subsequently, the editorial claimed to have encouraged the publication of hundreds of articles and the organization of dozens of public discussion groups on the problem of fertility decline in Bulgaria. It had stimulated the creation of a League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents, and the formation of a commission at the Directorate of People's Health, whose aim was to draft a bill for the protection of large families in Bulgaria. In July 1939, the *People's Health* affirmed that the corresponding bill was already in the hands of the parliamentary deputies and that it would soon become law.¹³ *The Medico-Pedagogical Journal* had already made earlier statements about a pronatalist bill in October 1938.¹⁴

The existence of a commission in charge of a pronatalist bill was further confirmed by other mass media sources,¹⁵ and Dr Rusi Radkov, now promoted to Director of the General Directorate of People's Health, was alleged to be its head. Nearly fifty years later, *Encyclopedia Bulgaria* described Radkov as the author of the Law for the Preservation and Increase of the Bulgarian *Volk*,¹⁶ voted by the National Assembly as the Law for Large Bulgarian Families in 1943.¹⁷ By the mid-1930s, Radkov, a former recipient of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, had become a highly influential figure within both Bulgarian political and international life. Director of the General Directorate of People's Health, founder of the Institute for

¹¹ "Editor's notes: On large, *mnogodetni* families," p. 15.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See Professor Dr M. Geraskov, "Razhdaemost i otlezhhdane na potomstvo" [Reproduction and rearing of offspring], *Mediko-Pedagogicheskoe Spisanie* [Medico-pedagogical journal], No. 1 (October 1938), pp. 7–15.

¹⁵ "Kakvo e nuzhno za zapazvane i razrastvane na bulgarskia narod" [What is needed to preserve and increase the Bulgarian Volk], *The World*, No. 11520 (22 December 1938), p. 3.

¹⁶ In this case, the German term *Volk*, which, according to the context of its use, can imply both "people" and "nation," has been preferred to render the meaning of its Bulgarian analogue *narod*.

¹⁷ *Entsiklopediia Bŭlgaria* [Encyclopedia Bulgaria] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1986), V, pp. 653–654.

No bill under this particular title, however, was found in the files of the Ministry of the Interior and People's Health at the National State Archives, Sofia. Nevertheless, it is likely that Radkov was behind one of the bills which Gabrovski, Minister of the Interior, considered in the early 1940s while working on the draft law for large families.

People’s Health (the latter being generously sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation),¹⁸ Chair of the Supreme Medical Council (1935–1939) and director of the Higher School for Physical Education (1943–1945), to enumerate just a few of his positions, Radkov was also member of the International Union Against Tuberculosis founded in Paris in 1920,¹⁹ member of the International Save-the-Children Union and acting Vice-President of the Hygiene Section of the League of Red Cross Societies. *Encyclopedia Bulgaria* ascribes to him the organization of over 100 health services in Bulgaria, over eighty village healthcare centers and the establishment of thirty hospitals. Radkov was also said to have been involved in the preparation of six decrees and eleven bills, among which was the Large, *Mnogodetni* Family Bill.²⁰

Nevertheless, it remains uncertain which institution or public figure first raised the alarm concerning the plummeting birth rates in Bulgaria. Although the *People’s Health* officially expressed the point of view of the Directorate of People’s Health, its later issues focused less on pronatalist concerns than on matters of social hygiene. Warnings were also voiced by other prominent public figures, such as Professor Stefan Konsulov, Professor Iliia Ianulov,²¹ by G.I. Lebedev-Bogar, a journalist,²² and by Zakhari Zhekov, founder of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents. The

¹⁸ Under socialism, the Institute for People’s Health was renamed the Institute for Contagious and Parasitic Diseases [*Institut za Zarazni Bolesti i Parazitni Zaboliavania*]. For further details, see *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, V (1986), p. 654.

¹⁹ The International Union Against Tuberculosis, later renamed as the Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, was founded in Paris in 1920, after an international conference on tuberculosis (TB), where delegates one after another had pledged “to agree on the means to fight TB, to come to a consensus on a strategy, to jointly apply the most effective weapons to combat this common enemy.” The Union was conceived as a federation of national associations, and in order to supplement the routine reports of its conferences (ten up to 1939), a regular publication, the Bulletin, commenced in 1923. In this pre-war period, the Bulletin included administrative reports and statistics (which would subsequently be compiled by the WHO) as well as information on the strategy and policies for the fight against TB and the results of numerous surveys on specific aspects of the disease. The Bulletin continued publication until the mid-1940s; the final editions contained the main reports which were to have been given at the 11th conference planned for Berlin in September 1939, the same month when the Second World War commenced.

For further information, see http://www.iuatld.org/full_picture/en/about/history/history.phtml; last accessed 28 March 2009.

²⁰ *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, V, pp. 653–654.

²¹ Iliia Ianulov (1880–1962): lawyer, economist, sociologist, Professor of Labor Law (Sofia University), lecturer at the World Academy of International Law at The Hague (1935); Chair of the Bulgarian Association for Social Progress; activist of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (“Broad”). For further details, see *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, VII (1996), p. 584.

²² *Pokhod* [On the march], No. 50–51 (12 July 1940), p. 3.

state, for its part, was claimed to have accepted their “competent judgment and went ahead with the drafting of the bill.”²³

In 1938 and 1939, well-known Bulgarian intellectuals held a number of public presentations on Bulgaria’s demographic situation, and a cluster of anxious publications on the descending birth rates appeared between March 1938 and April 1939. Simultaneously, a new area of discourse emerged in the public realm, aimed to redefine family structures, reconsider traditional family values, and channel gender relations within the framework of pronatalist ideology. The *People’s Health* and *Radio Sofia* were the pioneers in this, followed by other intellectual journals. However, since *Radio Sofia* had become Bulgaria’s official state radio in 1935²⁴ and the *People’s Health* was linked to the Directorate of People’s Health and hence to the Ministry of the Interior and People’s Health, it is likely that the initial pronatalist anxieties had been generated by the state itself. This assumption is in accord with the authoritarian “spirit” of the time, dominated by relatively strict media censorship but characterized also by a tendency on the part of intellectuals to sympathize with and support state intervention in social life as long as it assumed the cover of state protectionism of national culture and of its representatives.²⁵ As the population question was raised in this rather coordinated way, the contributors to the pronatalist discourse might have responded to a state-set agenda, while being granted the freedom to express their (semi-)independent points of view, too.

Views on Bulgaria’s fertility decline varied, as did the explanations of the perceived causes of the phenomenon. The factors identified ranged from the purely individualistic and egocentric to the cultural and economic, and embraced motives from what was imagined to be parental egotism to the rising costs of living and progressing impoverishment. By and large, the debates referred to or repeated the demographic findings of Dr Slavcho Zagorov,

²³ Iliia Ianulov, “Predvidlivost” [Foresight], *Bulletin of the Bulgarian Association for Social Progress*, No. 4 (1941), pp. 1–14, here p. 9; idem, *Sotsialno pokrovitelstvo na maichinstvoto u nas i v chuzhbina* [Social protection of motherhood in Bulgaria and abroad] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa “Stopansko razvitiie,” 1943), p. 40.

²⁴ Radio Sofia, initially called *Rodno Radio* [Native radio], started broadcasting in November 1929 under the private initiative of the Association *Rodno Radio*. Since the beginning of 1932, it regularly broadcast three hours a day, devoting most of its time to music, educational issues and children’s programs. The Radio Decree-Law [*Naredba-Zakon za Radioto*] from 1935 subjected its activity to the interest and the requirements of the state. For further details, see *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, V (1986), p. 545.

²⁵ Poppetrov, “Attempts to channel culture in Bulgaria,” p. 188.

head of the Statistical Office,²⁶ and of Professor Dimitŭr Mishaikov, head of the Department of Theoretical Statistics and chair of the Supreme Council of Statistics,²⁷ which were published in 1931, 1934 and 1938 respectively. The arguments reflected at times Zagorov’s recommendations to reduce infant mortality rates, and at times Mishaikov’s pronatalistist viewpoint.

2. Demographers on the “collapsing” demographic trend

Except for Zagorov’s work *Population Reproduction in Bulgaria* (1934), none of the demographic studies of the two prominent statisticians and politicians was intended to treat the question of Bulgarian birth rates on its own, but took into account a broader view of the dynamics of population in Europe as a whole. Furthermore, although Zagorov became actively involved in Bulgarian politics from 1940, he seems to have carefully avoided embarking on any population debates in public.²⁸ However, while detailing Europe’s demography in their works, Zagorov and Mishaikov inevitably drew comparisons with the population situation in Bulgaria and made comments on it.

Zagorov’s 1931 paper, *The Fertility Decrease in Europe and its Causes*, was the first to pay notice to the declining birth rates in the country. Yet, it had the characteristic of a mere comparative statement, and the statistical data were relegated to the footnotes.²⁹

²⁶ P. Shapkarev and A. Totev, *Sto Godini Bŭlgarska Dŭrzhavna Statistika, 1881–1991* [One hundred years of Bulgarian state statistics, 1881–1981] (Sofia: Komitet po edinna sistema za sotsialna informatsia pri Ministerskia Sŭvet, 1981), pp. 30–31.

Slavcho Zagorov (1898–1965): Director of the Statistical Office (1934–1942); head of the Department of Statistics (Sofia University, 1942); researcher in political economy and statistics at Harvard, Geneva, London, and Cambridge Universities (1933–1937); national deputy at the XXVth ONA (1940–1944); Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Labor (1939–1942). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 188–189.

²⁷ Dimitŭr Mishaikov (1883–1945): Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Law, Sofia University (1919–1922), head of the Department of Theoretical Statistics (1924–1944), head of the Supreme Council of Statistics; member of the International Institute of Statistics (The Hague); Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Trade (1930–1931); Minister of People’s Education (July–Oct. 1936). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 296–297.

²⁸ Note also that Zagorov provided access to the necessary demographic data for the editorial of the *World* in December 1938, but he did not himself participate in the dispute. His radio presentation on 12 October 1939, as stated earlier, strictly focused on child mortality and welfare issues.

²⁹ Slavcho Zagorov, *Namalenieto na Razhdaemostta v Evropa i Negovite Prichini* [The fertility decrease in Europe and its causes] (Sofia: Kooperativna pechatnitsa “Gutenberg,” 1931). The paper was based on a lecture delivered on 13 November 1930.

Table 4.2.
Number of legitimate live-born children per 1000 married women
up to the age of forty-five³⁰

	1899/02	1904/07	1909/12	1919/22	1925/28
Rural	306.1	322.9	294.8	282.1	231.1
Urban	246.1	243.0	222.3	212.1	165.3

Zagorov noted that, viewed as part of an overall European tendency, Bulgaria's birth rates had first started declining in the urban setting, and since 1909–1912 this had affected the rural environment as well.³¹ Three years later, he added some new observations emphasizing that since 1926 the natural population growth had been deteriorating “very quickly” due to the falling fertility rates of married women in all age groups.³² If this process were to continue and the mortality index were not dramatically reduced, Zagorov estimated that by around 1950 Bulgaria's population in its present (i.e., post-1919) territory would increase to 7,500,000, yet further natural growth would cease.³³

Following current demographic tendencies and provided that no extraordinary events (wars, earthquakes, etc.) interfered with the country's social circumstances, Zagorov foresaw some less positive developments, although he denied his calculations had the power of prediction. He symbolically compared the future demographic balance to an enlarged field progressively leaving more “fallow land” and less output per land unit.³⁴ According to his computations, it was likely that within the next twenty years the general index of marital fertility would further decrease by another ten per cent—although in the past twenty years (1910–1930) it had already dropped by thirty per cent. Women had to bear 3.07 children at least in order to preserve the population levels of 1930.

³⁰ Source: Slavcho Zagorov, *The Fertility Decrease in Europe and its Causes*, p. 6, footnote 1. Similar Slavcho Zagorov, *Vŭzproizvezhdaneto na Naselenieto v Bŭlgaria* [Population reproduction in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Poligrafia AD, 1934), pp. 37–38.

³¹ Zagorov, *The Fertility Decrease in Europe*, p. 6.

³² Zagorov, *Population Reproduction in Bulgaria*, pp. 5, 13–14.

³³ Ibid., p. 62. Zagorov's estimate proved correct. According to data cited in *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, the country's population in 1950 was 7,273,100. For further details, see *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, IV (1984), p. 469.

³⁴ Zagorov, *Population Reproduction in Bulgaria*, p. 64.

Zagorov admitted that Bulgaria’s demographic situation was far better off than many other European countries, yet he also emphasized that the country could encounter population problems in her near future. The maximum pre-war population growth of twenty-two per cent had become an unattainable, but indeed also an undesirable objective. The capacity of the country was not able to bear such growth of population without undergoing a significant drop in its standard of living. Consequently, in Zagorov’s estimation, it was better to maintain a more modest growth rate of 10–12 per thousand. He favored a decrease of infant mortality as the crucial intervention method for fulfilling this demographic objective³⁵—a view which he had articulated earlier in *The Fertility Decrease in Europe and its Causes* in 1931. Whereas nations such as France, Estonia, Austria, Sweden, England, Switzerland, Belgium, and Germany were soon to confront reproduction anxieties, Bulgaria’s quantitative population tendencies diverged from the other European nations’ path. Bulgaria needed a different approach to sustain a large natural growth as her high nuptiality compensated for the decrease in marital fertility. The decline of the birth rate could be made good by a drop in mortality and especially in infant mortality, in which Bulgaria surpassed all other countries in Europe.³⁶

Mishaikov, both a teacher and a close friend of Zagorov’s, had in mind a different solution to the growing problem.³⁷ Fearing that Bulgaria might run into the danger of zero population growth in the future,³⁸ he proposed a combination of eugenic and pronatalist measures to tackle the population issue. Among the recommended remedies were the prevention of marriages between unhealthy individuals and a sterner approach to venereal diseases, a less rigid attitude towards children born outside wedlock, which would in turn reduce the number of induced abortions, the removal of marriage impediments and the provision of long-term nuptial loans, subsidies for large families, family allowances, and child-dependent tax relief. Land reforms for landless and small landholders were also part of the solution to the population problem.³⁹

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 72–74.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 19–20.

³⁷ Despite the differences in their points of view, Zagorov continuously cited Mishaikov in his writings, while Mishaikov dedicated a copy of his *Population Dynamics* from 1941 to Zagorov.

³⁸ Dimităr Mishaikov, *Problemi na Bŭlgarskoto Naselenie* [Problems of the Bulgarian population] (Sofia, 1938), p. 689.

³⁹ Mishaikov, *Problems of the Bulgarian Population*, p. 691.

Mishaikov, however, cautiously avoided any grandiose perspectives. He admitted pragmatically that while pronatalist measures were being discussed worldwide, their implementation in other countries was still either rudimentary or non-existent. Hence, it was impossible to evaluate their relevance in practice. In the case of Bulgaria, he considered that the restrictions imposed on employment opportunities for family members in the state sector had been a legislative act which hardly encouraged marriages.⁴⁰ What Mishaikov was attacking here was the Decree-Law for Employment Opportunities by Family Members in State, Municipal, and Autonomous Institutions, approved by the Council of Ministers on 25 July 1935. The Decree had set a maximum threshold of family income when more than one member of the family was employed by a central or local governmental institution, and had limited state employees' monthly income to a total of 3000 levs or 4000 levs taking into consideration qualifications (secondary or university degree). Families with four or five members were allowed a total monthly income in the range of 5,000-6,000 levs, whereas larger families (six plus) were allowed a monthly income between 6,000 and 7,000 levs. If a family member's income already amounted to 7,000 levs per month, other members of the same family were banned from regular employment.⁴¹ The Decree-Law had had no gender-biased target, nor had it any pronatalist objectives.

Mishaikov did not share Zagorov's anxieties about the country's economic potential failing to cope with a possible future doubling of her population. On the contrary, in his view, population growth was a necessary factor for enhancing Bulgaria's agricultural development—as “for the time being, in Bulgaria, Russia, Yugoslavia and Romania natural resources are not sufficiently utilized”⁴² and “we are far from the maximum limit of land output. Our land can absorb a far greater labor potential.”⁴³ His difference in opinion might have largely reflected the changing political and economic circumstances in the country.⁴⁴ In 1934, both the internal and external posi-

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “Decree-Law for Employment Opportunities of Family Members in State, Municipal and Autonomous Institutions” [*Naredba-Zakon za Zaemane na Slůzhba ot Chlenovete na Edno Semeistvo v Důrzhavni, Obshtinski i Avtonomni Uchrezhdenia*], *State Gazette*, 29 July 1935.

⁴² Mishaikov, *Problems of the Bulgarian Population*, p. 690.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ No concrete statements by either Mishaikov or Zagorov could be located which would relate their demographic considerations to Bulgaria's changing international position and politics. The current analysis should

tion of Bulgaria continued to reflect the consequences of her defeat in the First World War and her international isolation. However, hopes for a peaceful revision of the territorial settlements of the Neuilly Peace Treaty grew substantially after the 1938 Munich settlement of Germany with Italy, Britain, and France, according to which Germany restored her territories within her own ethnic boundaries.⁴⁵ Between 1938 and 1941 Bulgaria, too, managed to re-establish her rights to a full, conscription-based army (July 1938), got back the long-aspired territory of the southern Dobrudzha (September 1940), joined the German–Italian–Japanese Tripartite Pact (1 March 1941),⁴⁶ and in April 1941, occupied Aegean and Vardar Macedonia, and took the first step to encourage Bulgarian settlement in the region.⁴⁷

The now favorable political and territorial background might have provided Mishaikov with the necessary confidence to insist on a population policy oriented toward growth of fertility. He provided an ideological justification in 1941, in his critical examination of Malthus in *Population Dynamics*. He objected to Malthus’s fear that resources would be unable to meet the demands of a rising human population if left unchecked. Instead, he argued that assets could be increased by the acquisition of new lands, by the proper utilization of public domain lands, by the amplification of foreign trade in agriculture, and by the intensification of labor productivity based on improved technology.⁴⁸

In 1941, Mishaikov presented new and distressing figures on the dynamics of falling birth rates and the slackening of natural population growth over the previous decade. Some significant decline in the natural population growth had started in 1930 and had been continuing uninterruptedly since then, affecting almost equally both cities and rural areas. The reason for the substantial reduction was clearly rooted in the faster dropping numbers of births compared to deaths, as the relative number of births had declined by fifty-six per cent whereas that of deaths by merely thirty-six per cent in the rural areas

therefore, strictly speaking, be considered as informed conjecture. Whether Mishaikov’s political adherence to the National Social Movement of Aleksandŭr Tsankov might have colored his views of Bulgaria’s demography is an issue for further research.

⁴⁵ Stelova and Grüncharov, *A History of Modern Bulgaria*, p. 589; Richard Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, p. 169.

⁴⁶ Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, pp. 168–171.

⁴⁷ Stelova and Grüncharov, *A History of Modern Bulgaria*, pp. 604–605.

⁴⁸ Dimitŭr Mishaikov, *Dinamika na Naselenieto* [Population dynamics] (Sofia, 1941), p. 46.

within the period of 1911–1938. Mishaikov referred to the steep fall of the natural population growth in 1938 as “alarming for our future” although he welcomed the halt of the tendency in 1940 as “pleasing.”⁴⁹ He explained the latter by the increasing number of young mothers from 1940 onwards—a result from the post-World War I increase of births in 1919–1927.⁵⁰

Table 4.3.
Birth rates, mortality rates and natural population growth per 1000
in the period 1911–1940⁵¹

Year	Births	per 1000	Deaths	per 1000	Natural	Population	Growth
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Total
1911	30.1	42.6	20.1	21.9	10.0	20.7	18.7
1920	31.7	42.0	21.1	21.6	10.6	20.4	18.5
1930	23.8	33.4	14.2	16.7	9.6	16.7	15.2
1938	17.1	24.4	12.4	14.0	4.7	10.4	9.1
1940	17.1	23.7	12.9	13.6	4.2	10.1	8.8

Regardless of their different approaches to population growth, the two demographers shared similar ideas about the factors behind the decline in Bulgarian fertility. In 1934, Zagorov stressed that cultural progress (civilization), understood as a mental rather than an ethical factor and passed down from the rich to the poor, from the town to the village, and from industrial to agricultural societies, had to be held responsible for the overall birth decline of the white race.⁵² He sided with the late-nineteenth Italian scholar Salvatore del Vecchio’s argument that an inverse correlation existed between birth rates and civilization levels, and pointed out that this dynamic interrelation had been well demonstrated in the statistical data derived from the Bulgarian rural environment after the First World War. The higher the educational level of the population (and of women in particular), the lower was the marital birth rate.⁵³ Zagorov’s interpretation of the

⁴⁹ Mishaikov, *Population Dynamics*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵² Zagorov, *Population Reproduction in Bulgaria*, pp. 37–41. Zagorov made use of Mishaikov’s definition of “culture” in his study *Niakolko Misli vŭrhu Poniatieto Kultura* [Some considerations regarding the term “culture”]. In this work Mishaikov had defined cultural progress as a change of human conscience rather than a change of objects. Material goods in themselves did not represent culture but were a cultural result. See further details, see Zagorov, p. 41 (footnote asterix).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

impact of civilization on fertility decline, however, differed from that of J. J. Rousseau, who had denounced economic development as harmful social luxury.⁵⁴ He also differed from late nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century French and German demographers who had interpreted civilization as giving rise to the universal propagation of comfort, the extension of leisure, the pursuit of pleasure, feminism, ambition, and the egoistical, and hence, of the intentional and selfish decline of fertility within marriage.⁵⁵ Although in Bulgaria similar correlations could be traced on a surface level, Zagorov deemed them insufficient to support generalized conclusions. He refused to indulge in ethical judgment on manifestations of atheism, female emancipation, and cultural progress in Bulgaria, but recommended instead extensive research into parents' conscious decision-making to restrict their progeny.⁵⁶ The Bulgarian setting substantially differed from the European and North American one, where the combination of feminism, the use of contraceptives, and a fading sense of religious faith were predictably factors contributing to the decrease of birth rates.⁵⁷ Yet, “in Bulgaria one can speak of emancipation only with respect to urban women. Peasant women avoid childbearing either because they are concerned about their early ageing or because they fear the pangs of endless pregnancies.”⁵⁸ In Bulgaria contraceptives were known only in the cities. In villages, birth prevention was left entirely to women, secretly in the form of induced abortion.⁵⁹

Zagorov admitted that civilization in the form of improved childcare and hygiene played a vital part in fertility decrease, as it went hand in hand with reduced child mortality. Statistical data from most European countries, and in Germany (Württemberg) in particular, offered similar evidence. Yet, the Bulgarian case followed a different pattern. Citing Friedrich Prinzing,⁶⁰ Zagorov stressed that in Bulgaria infant mortality rates were still very high despite the slight and tentative decrease since the end of the First World War. In contrast, nuptial fertility had for a longer while been dropping conspicuously.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

⁵⁵ J. Bertillon and Mombert, in particular. See “Endnote” No. 21, *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 43, 49.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶⁰ Fr. Prinzing, *Manual for Medical Statistics*, p. 375, in Zagorov, *Population Reproduction in Bulgaria*, p. 45.

According to Zagorov, *l'arrivisme*, i.e., the strife for ascension and social promotion, especially strong in democratic societies, was a noticeable phenomenon in Bulgaria, too.⁶¹ P. Leroy-Beaulieu, the nineteenth-century French author who coined the term *l'arrivisme*, had interpreted personal ascent as a factor which induced people to put off having children until they reached a position of high status. Within the framework of Bulgarian reality, however (i.e., characterized by an early and universal nuptial pattern with a particular emphasis on the value of children), motivations for fertility restriction differed substantially from that held to be valid for nineteenth-century France. Zagorov construed cultural progress as characterized by the parents' desire to provide their children (rather than themselves) with a chance to move up the social hierarchy. The numerous personal material costs and sacrifices required to promote and guarantee children's social mobility placed a severe economic strain on the family and influenced their reproductive mode. Periods of economic crisis additionally enhanced the family's deprivation. Within the framework of such reasoning, numerous children meant a substantial decline of the family's standard of living, and few parents would opt for it.⁶² This was why in Bulgaria fertility rates had gone down simultaneously both in the affluent and poor sectors of society.

In his *Population Dynamics*, Mishaikov, too, singled out growing parental individualism, conceptualized as the aspiration to provide children with better life chances in a framework of higher consumer standards, as the determining factor for the onset of the ongoing birth rationalization. An additional factor was the falling mortality rate, which since the nineteenth century the culturally advanced countries had experienced as a result of improved hygiene, especially among children, and the progress of preventive medicine. However, Bulgaria was predominantly rural, and hence her case differed.

In Mishaikov's view, agricultural societies and populations of a generally lower culture were far more at the mercy of transitory phenomena, such as natural calamities and economic fluctuations, as causes of their fertility aberrations.⁶³ As early as 1921, he had computed a direct correlation between harvests and the levels of nuptiality, fertility, and mortality in Bulgaria in the period 1888–1911. A bad harvest followed by a decline in the

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 43–44.

⁶³ Mishaikov, *Population Dynamics*, pp. 58–59.

export of agricultural goods exerted an immediate negative impact on the birth rate, whereas a good harvest boosted it. Hence, the root causes of the oscillating figures of population growth were to be found in the predominantly agrarian economy of the country—a peculiarity which would not permit the application of the popular Western *Wohlstandstheorie* [prosperity theory]⁶⁴ to the majority of the Bulgarian population.

Regardless of the differences in Mishaikov's and Zagorov's considerations of what should constitute the right and appropriate policies to fight declining birth rates in Bulgaria, both experts and politicians ruled out individual and parental egotism as a factor of relevance in explaining the country's deteriorating fertility numbers. Nevertheless, moralizing interpretations applied to Bulgarian society did make their appearance in the popular media of the late 1930s and provoked a broad public discourse.

3. Mass media responses to fertility decline

ETHNIC IMBALANCE AND MILITARY ALARM

It was an interview given by Professor Stefan Konsulov to the influential daily newspaper the *World* which triggered a broad pronatalist debate in Bulgaria in December 1938. The interview itself was part of a survey on the decline in birth rates in Bulgaria which the *World* organized on the eve of 1939.⁶⁵ The views which Konsulov expressed were largely an abbreviated summary of those put forward in an earlier article of his, published

⁶⁴ The *Wohlstandstheorie* is associated with the names of Johannes Conrad and C. J. Fuchs, and especially Lujo Brentano (1844–1931), German economist and prominent advocate of economic liberalism.

The *Wohlstandstheorie* established that normal fertility was that experienced by the poor, and that deviations occurred as the level of welfare increased. It was based on the mid-nineteenth-century perception that with time, higher culture became a substitute for merely animal (understand, sexual) enjoyment, and hence, was bound to bring about lowering of the sexual drive. In Brentano's considerations, the introduction of "competitive" enjoyments of a physical-comfort variety into the life of successive nations and classes competed with people's reproduction. Within this mental framework, children started to be viewed as depriving their parents from gratifications in life. The *Wohlstandstheorie* differed from other fertility theories in placing less emphasis on moralizing aspects. Instead, it underlined the elevating effects of comfort in general. Brentano, as an economist, was not interested in explaining why higher cultural stages should witness such changes in human needs and desires. For further details, see D.E.C Eversley, *Social Theories of Fertility and the Malthusian Debate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 14, 59, 224–225.

⁶⁵ See the *World*, No. 11512, 11514, 11518, 11520, 11522, and 11527, of 13 Dec., 15 Dec., 20 Dec., 22 Dec., 24 Dec., and 29 Dec. 1938.

in the intellectual and extreme right-wing journal *Enlightenment* in March 1938. Konsulov's radical interpretations of Bulgaria's falling birth rates provoked an intense dispute amongst well-known Bulgarian intellectuals and his interview became widely cited in a number of articles. Since Konsulov's line of reasoning represented a viewpoint which Petūr Gabrovski, Minister of the Interior and People's Health (1940–1943), tried to suppress by censorship during the public promotion of what finally became the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families in 1943,⁶⁶ it is worth examining Konsulov's position in more detail.

In March 1938, Konsulov, a professor of zoology at Sofia University, Chair of the Society for Enlightenment and a person well known for his racist views and pro-German orientation,⁶⁷ published an article entitled "Melting is the worst danger for the Bulgarian Volk,"⁶⁸ a thesis which he repeated in several issues of the *World* in 1938.⁶⁹ There, Bulgaria's demography was related to budding nationalistic issues, such as her diverse ethnic composition and her insecure international status in the light of a possible future war. Konsulov based his demographic analysis on a definition of a nation as "a set of peoples, related to each other by their common origin and by their history of a centuries-long co-existence together, where due to the mixture of their blood, a biologically identical race was created."⁷⁰ As a result of this fusion, every member of the national community bore the consciousness of a common belonging and hence shared with the rest a common national feeling. If the latter were lacking, then no nation would exist.⁷¹ Konsulov saw Bulgaria's national problem in her constituent ethnic elements, which bore different racial and demographic characteristics, and were the historical legacy of past Ottoman rule. He promoted the view that the composition of the Bulgarian nation had reached its fulfillment by the biological merging of early proto-

⁶⁶ See Speech of Dimitūr Andreev and Gabrovski's reply during the debates on the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), p. 950.

⁶⁷ See Appendix in Vasil Mitakov, *Dnevnik na Pravosūdnia Ministūr v Pravitelstvata na Georgi Kioseivanov i Bogdan Filov* [Diary of the Minister of Justice in the cabinets of G. Kioseivanov and B. Filov] (Sofia: Trud, 2001), p. 871.

⁶⁸ Stefan Konsulov, "Nai-goliamata opasnost za bulgarskia narod - negovoto stopiavane" [Melting is the worst danger for the Bulgarian Volk], *Prosveta* [Enlightenment], No. 7 (March 1938), pp. 794–808.

⁶⁹ Stefan Konsulov, "Kak da se borim s namaliavashkata razhdaemost u nas" [How to fight the falling birth rates in our country], the *World*, No. 11318 (18 May 1938), p. 3; idem, "Vūprosūt za namaliavashkata razhdaemost u nas" [The problem of falling birth rates in our country], the *World*, No. 11514 (15 December 1938), p. 3.

⁷⁰ Konsulov, "Melting is the worst danger for the Bulgarian Volk," p. 795.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Bulgarians and local Balkan tribes in the pre-Ottoman period, and that this fusion had been completed to an extent which would make the integration of any further races impossible. The Turkish population in Bulgaria, as part of the demographic legacy of the Ottoman rule, had a distinct non-Bulgarian consciousness, and hence was “alien” to the Bulgarian nation.⁷²

It was, however, these foreign, non-Bulgarian elements which, in contrast to Bulgarians, were increasing their biological numbers and were thus driving the Bulgarian nation out of its own domain. If this process continued, “after several generations, the foreigners will become a majority in our country, whereas we [Bulgarians—S.B.] will be a minority.”⁷³ As the nation was supposed to be the creator of its own history, its being numerous was a prerequisite for its successful historical mission.⁷⁴

Konsulov’s concerns, though heavily racially colored, did not lack certain political and demographic grounds. In February 1934, Bulgaria’s long-standing territorial rivals, Turkey, Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia had formed the Balkan *entente* meant to guarantee their existing borders. As long as the Balkan *entente* had identified the potential enemy as coming from within the peninsula (rather than from any Great Power), it had also reinforced Bulgaria’s international isolation and bore a menacing similarity to the hostile coalition of the Second Balkan War (29 June–13 October 1913).⁷⁵ In the domain of home policy, the establishment of the Balkan *entente* coincided with radical measures against the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, especially after the military coup on 19 May 1934. Turkish political parties and organizations were banned, Turkish schools and periodicals reduced in number, and ethnic Bulgarian university graduates were appointed mayors in the Muslim districts. In response, Turkey had started a mass anti-Bulgarian campaign, accompanied by appeals for military intervention. However, in 1936–1937 the tension between the two neighbor countries had been partly relieved with the signing of an agreement for a long-term limited annual emigration of 10,000 Turks to Turkey.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 794.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 795.

⁷⁵ Crampton, *A Short History of Bulgaria*, p. 109; *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, pp. 139–140, 162.

⁷⁶ Valeri Stoiانov, “Turkoto naselenie v Bŭlgaria i ofitsialnata maltsinstvena politika, 1878–1944” [The Turkish population in Bulgaria and official minority policy, 1878–1944], in Petŭr Angelov (ed.), *Stranitsi ot Bŭlgarskata Istoriia* [Pages from Bulgarian history] (Sofia, 1993), pp. 270–271.

The political situation seemed to have been further aggravated by the publication of disconcerting demographic data, which disclosed a distinct difference in the natural increase between ethnic Bulgarians and minority Muslims in favor of the latter.

Table 4.4. Population growth of Bulgaria's major confessional groups for 1933–1936⁷⁷

Confessional groups	Population growth per thousand
Eastern Christian Orthodox	12.6
Muslims	17.8
Jews	6.7
Armeno-Gregorians	1.1
Catholics	15.1
Protestants	14.1

All in all, the overall population growth seemed to favor the Bulgarian component (fifteen per cent for the period 1926–1936), whereas the Muslims (Turks, Pomaks, a considerable part of the Gypsies, and Tatars)⁷⁸ showed an increase of 1.8 per cent from 1926 until 1936. Yet, these figures were distorted by the Muslim emigration from Bulgaria, which predominantly embraced groups in the prime fecund ages.⁷⁹ As far as natural population growth was concerned, it was highest among the Muslims, where their higher mortality rates were compensated by their considerably higher birth rates. Eastern Orthodox Christians (i.e., ethnic Bulgarians) came second.⁸⁰

Basing his statement on Professor Zagorov's demographic research data, Konsulov drew a deeply pessimistic picture of the outlook for Bulgaria's population growth within the next two or three decades.

The Bulgarian ethnic population was not simply "melting away"; the birth decline was mainly pronounced in the country's culturally most advanced and affluent parts, such as the Tŭrnovo, the Driianovo, the Gorna Oriiakhovitsa and the Gabrovo districts. In contrast, culturally backward districts like Tsaribrod and Radomir, were those least affected by the birth decline.

⁷⁷ Mishaikov, *Population Dynamics* (Sofia, 1941), pp. 5–6.

⁷⁸ *Churches and Religions of the People's Republic of Bulgaria* (Sofia: Synodal Publishing House, 1975), p. 76.

⁷⁹ Chankov, *The Population of Bulgaria*, p. 241; Mishaikov, *Population Dynamics*, pp. 20–21.

⁸⁰ Mishaikov, *Population Dynamics*, pp. 5–6.

Table 4.5. Population growth per 1000 of population for the period 1904–1936⁸¹

Period	Birth rates per thousand	Mortality rates per thousand	Growth per 1000
1904–1907	43.3	21.9	21.4
1909–1912	41.0	22.8	18.2
1919–1922	39.4	21.5	17.9
1925–1928	34.8	18.4	16.4
1929–1931	29.9	16.6	13.3
1936	25.6	15.1	11.5

Table 4.6. Population decline for the period 1909–1928⁸²

District of Tsaribrod	5%
District of Radomir	6%
District of Tŭrnovo	40%
District of Driianovo	42%
District of G. Oriakhovitsa	42.8%
District of Gabrovo	46.8%

Konsulov rejected poverty and nuptial abstinence as factors driving the reproductive decline of the Bulgarian race. In his interpretation, “the most fundamental source of this evil is the fact that mothers have got out of the practice of bearing children.”⁸³ In his view, there was a direct relationship between civilization progress and birth rate decline. Fertility decline, a universal phenomenon, had reached Bulgaria and had its most pronounced effects in the urban environments. The rural population, however, proved to be affected by it, too. In Konsulov’s opinion, the country was facing an essential social problem, namely the preservation of the reproductive traditions of her once fertile rural population. Since Bulgaria’s rural population was also the nation’s primary fertility pool, the situation was turning into an emergency issue. Konsulov made repeated reference to an earlier work of his, in which he had propagated the dangers of racial degeneration once the nation’s most valuable elements decreased to the advantage

⁸¹ Konsulov, “Melting is the worst danger for the Bulgarian Volk,” p. 798.

⁸² Ibid., p. 799.

⁸³ Konsulov, “Melting is the worst danger for the Bulgarian Volk,” p. 799; “How to fight falling birth rates in our country,” p. 3.

of a population of lower biological qualities.⁸⁴ Drawing on his earlier “findings,” he warned that the steady process of birth rate decline would eventually undermine the genetic pool of the Bulgarian race,⁸⁵ and affect the vital institutions of its army and schools. As a result, the country might easily fall prey to her far more numerous neighbors—fourteen-million Yugoslavia, eighteen-million Romania, and twenty-million Turkey. Bulgaria’s neighbors had not suffered a fertility retreat; on the contrary, their population numbers were rising. In two or three decades, Konsulov predicted, their armies would double their numbers, whereas the Bulgarian military strength would decline by fifty per cent. This would be the end of Bulgaria, Konsulov feared, as “who will prevent our neighbors from reaching for the fruit just ripe for them? Will the League of Nations interfere, or perhaps, the Great Powers, who are allies of our neighbors?”⁸⁶

Konsulov did not deny the positive aspects of “civilization.” Indeed, he proudly emphasized that within half a century Bulgaria had caught up and even surpassed the cultural achievements of countries with far longer and independent histories. Yet, with no firm traditions to resist the negative aspects of western culture which was penetrating the country, the Bulgarians had turned their back on their traditions, lost their national pride, and, instead, had focused on their private self-interests. The traditional Bulgarian family virtues were disintegrating in the sea of growing egotism. The less children the culturally advanced individual had, the safer he felt about his material life, and the less he cared about leaving progeny behind to secure the country’s future. Reproductive egotism had led to the historical extinction of the Roman and Hellenic cultures in antiquity, and now it was threatening Bulgaria’s destiny, too. Konsulov saw the means for fighting the approaching demographic threat in a planned and well-promoted cult of the family in Bulgaria, and in the cultivation of respect for large families and a feeling of love for the nation and consideration for her future. Whether this ambitious program could be fulfilled, was a question whose solution he left to history.

Konsulov’s denial of a link between reproductive decline and impoverishment did not accord with the findings of contemporary research on

⁸⁴ Stefan Konsulov, *Izrazhdane na Kulturnoto Chovechestvo; Borba s Izrazhdaneto* [The degeneration of civilization: Fighting degeneration] (Sofia, 1928).

⁸⁵ Konsulov, “The problem of falling birth rates in our country,” p. 3.

⁸⁶ Konsulov, “Melting is the worst danger for the Bulgarian Volk,” pp. 804–805.

the economy of the agricultural population in Bulgaria, and should be read as the expression of a narrowly nationalistic framework of thought. Neither did his fear of the latent threat of ethnic imbalance from the part of the Turkish minority find much favor within the central government circles. To be sure, the preventive Law for Healthcare, 1929, had justified certain discriminatory health measures on the part of local authorities against the Roma and Turkish communities, especially within the content of the delousing campaigns in the 1930s and early 1940s. The fear of contagious diseases, and particularly, alarming incidents of typhus amongst the Muslim minorities, had been conventionally correlated, in the words of Austrian anthropologist Promitzer, to remnants of Oriental “primitivism” in “European” Bulgaria, and hence, could be interpreted as a technique of governmental control. Yet, Promitzer acknowledged that discriminatory practices against Muslims had not been an entirely “home-bred” Bulgarian product, but should be analyzed as the result of “nested Orientalism” in the country, due to a Habsburg influence “imported” by Bulgarian medical students from Austrian universities.⁸⁷

Overall, the state’s attitude towards Bulgaria’s Turkish minority traditionally depended on the country’s sensitive foreign relations with neighboring Turkey and hardly followed the logic of racism. In accord with the primary goal of the country’s foreign policy to regain her lost national territories through peaceful negotiations, ever since 1919 Bulgaria had been making every effort to avoid involvement in European military conflicts. As the country could neither join with nor destroy the Balkan entente, she had made numerous efforts to reaffirm her commitment to “peaceful revisionism” and as proof, all demonstrations calling for the annulment of the Neuilly settlements were banned in 1936. Furthermore, in January 1937, a Bulgarian–Yugoslav Pact of friendship was signed, and as the international setting had been continuously deteriorating, Bulgarian diplomats had actively offered

⁸⁷ Christian Promitzer, “Taking care of the national body: Eugenic visions in interwar Bulgaria, 1905–1940,” in Marius Turda and P. J. Weindling (eds.), *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2007), pp. 223–252; “Epidemics and Muslims: Typhus and delousing campaigns in Bulgaria”; “Betwixt and Between: Physical anthropology in Bulgaria and Serbia until the end of the First World War,” in Reinhard Johler, Christian Marchetti, and Monique Scheer, *Doing Anthropology in Wartime and War Zones*. Proceedings of the conference in Tübingen, 7–9 December 2006. In particular, note the German and Austrian impact on Bulgarian anthropologists and physicians.

their assistance as peace mediator between the Western democracies and the Third Reich. By spring 1938, Bulgaria's relations with Turkey had greatly improved in the face of the ominous forebodings of a future war, and in September 1940, Turkey approached Bulgaria and Yugoslavia with an offer to establish a joint defensive alliance. The latter, however, was never accepted for fear of antagonizing Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union.⁸⁸

Since October 1938, Bulgaria had started cherishing positive expectations about a peaceful revision of the Neuilly settlement regarding the southern Dobrudzha, and had made steps (though unofficially) to secure the international support of the Great Powers as well as the approval of Yugoslavia and Turkey in order to incline Romania to a territorial compromise. This, eventually, was accomplished in September 1940, when according to the Treaty of Craiova, Southern Dobrudzha was returned to Bulgaria.⁸⁹ In his declaration of 11 April 1942, Prime Minister Bogdan Filov stressed Bulgaria's commitment to the Tripartite Pact by exclusively underlining the country's "most friendly attitude towards Turkey."⁹⁰ Stirring or supporting nationalistic or ethnically antagonistic propaganda, and thus further aggravating Bulgaria's rather fragile international position, would hardly have been a desirable move on the part of Bulgaria's politicians. It is noteworthy that in his later publications, Konsulov, too, had tried to abstain from further comments on Bulgaria's ethnic demography and preferred to elaborate on the theme of parental selfishness instead.⁹¹

POPULATION GROWTH OR POVERTY CONCERNS?

Konsulov's views gained some acceptance amongst the *World's* reading audience, as well as from Professor Oswald Bumke, a distinguished German scholar and psychiatrist, at his guest lecture at Sofia University.⁹² Yet, explanations linked to growing individualism, egotism, and liberalism as

⁸⁸ Crampton, *A Short History of Bulgaria*, p. 123.

⁸⁹ Statelova and Grüncharov, *A History of Modern Bulgaria*, pp. 588–589.

⁹⁰ Bogdan Filov, *Ideologiya i Programa na Upravenieto na Bŭlgaria* [Ideology and program of the government of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa "Khudozhnik," 1942), p. 5.

⁹¹ See Konsulov's comments on Bulgaria's fertility decline in the *World* (15 December 1938), p. 3.

⁹² Prof. Dr Oswald Bumke, "Kultura i izrazhdane" [Culture and degeneration], *People's Health*, No. 1–2 (10 January 1939), p. 3; "Po vŭprosa za namaliavashtata razhdaemost u nas—mnenie na nashi chitateli" [On the problem of population decline in our country—readers' commentaries], *World*, No. 11527 (29 December 1938), p. 3.

the major factors behind Bulgaria's birth retreat met limited approval in the Bulgarian public space. Suggestions to stiffen religious morality, restrict divorce regulations and tighten the anti-abortion legislation seemed to find little resonance with most of the readers. On the contrary, a part of the responses to Konsulov's interview in the *World* seemed to have supported fertility restriction and emphasized the deteriorating economic conditions as the prime explanation for the increasing resort to birth control. Privation drove love away, and it was the bleak future perspective for their grown-up children that kept Bulgarian peasant women from giving birth more often, the readers stated.⁹³ Dr Mishakov, a doctor from the town of Khaskovo, recognized impoverishment as an important cause for delayed nuptiality or else marriages of convenience for financial reasons. Mishakov rejected the notion of marriage on the latter basis because he claimed it fostered spousal estrangement, adultery, divorce, or illegal cohabitation, and limited the number of desired children. Destitution went hand in hand with birth control and induced abortions, along with women's harsh treatment on the labor market, prostitution, and venereal disease.⁹⁴ The General Directorate of People's Health seemed to uphold the same viewpoint and recommended Dr Mishakov's monograph to the general public.⁹⁵

The problem of abstention from child-bearing resonated throughout Bulgaria's civil sector and a number of leading intellectuals and public figures joined the population debate. Without exception, they refused to side with Konsulov's perspective, nor did they support any nationalistic or racist discourse. Nevertheless, disquiet about the falling birth rate within the context of mounting international tension provoked uneasy thoughts about the country's weakened national and military defense, and was turned into an active driving force in the growing media debate.

Oswald Bumke (1877–1950), a German psychiatrist and neurologist, Rector of the Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich (1928–1929), long-term head of the Munich Neurological Clinic. His work focused on mental disorder and mental hygiene, the relationship between state policies, and feeble-mindedness. Any direct link between Bumke and the Nazi regime, however, has been refuted. In 1923, Bumke was invited by the Soviet government to join the international medical consortium charged with overseeing Lenin's failing health. For further details, see G.W. Schimmelpenninck, "Oswald Bumke (1877–1950). His life and work," *History of Psychiatry*, IV (1993), pp. 483–497.

⁹³ Ibid; Khristo Mishakov, *Zashto Namaliava Razhdaemostta, a Zaedno s Tova i Prirüsta na Naselenieto* [Why do fertility and population decline] (Stara Zagora: Pechatnitsa "Svetlina," 1938), p. 4.

⁹⁴ Mishakov, *Why do Fertility and Population Decline*, p. 4.

⁹⁵ *The People's Health*, 20 January 1939.

Most of the discussions centered on poverty and offered drafts for possible legislative remedies to combat population decline from this perspective. Dimitrana Ivanova, lawyer and chair of the Bulgarian Women's Union, was one of the first to publish her response to Konsulov's interview in the *World*.⁹⁶ In her opinion, depopulation tendencies in Bulgaria were "a direct consequence of the current economic instability, the long-term economic crisis, unemployment, low wages, poor income, and the high cost of living." She recalled earlier warnings of Professor Georgi Danailov (economist, statistician, and minister in A. Liapchev's third cabinet),⁹⁷ who argued that the economic conditions in post-First World War Bulgaria permitted an absolute maximum of two children per family. Ivanova underlined that Danailov's cautions had been ignored for so long because society had been consoling itself with the high birth rates despite its high infant mortality rates. Now, the situation had changed as within two years the birth rates had markedly declined, from 25.6 per thousand in 1936 to 23.9 per thousand in 1938. In contrast, Bulgaria's child mortality had increased from 260 in 1936 to 264 in 1937.⁹⁸ In Ivanova's view, palliative measures would provide little relief; what was urgently needed was an all-embracing social insurance legislation to alleviate the future hardship of those ineligible to a retirement pension (i.e., in 1938, intellectuals, agricultural workers, and craftsmen)⁹⁹ and to protect motherhood by including the wives of insured industrial workers in the insurance scheme.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Dimitrana Ivanova, "Za prirüsta na búlgarskia narod" [On the population growth of the Bulgarian Volk], *World*, No. 11522 (24 December 1938), p. 3; "Kakvo e nuzhno za zapazvane i razrastvane na búlgarskia narod" [How to preserve and increase the Bulgarian Volk], *World*, No. 11520 (22 December 1938), p. 3.

⁹⁷ Georgi Danailov (1872–1939): Professor and Head of the Law and Political Economy Departments (1902–1903, 1906–1907), (1935–1939) at Sofia University; member of the board of the Economic Society (1898–1920), chair of the socio-philosophical branch of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (1937–1939); member and one of the leaders of the Democratic Party; long-term national deputy; Minister of Commerce, Industry and Labor (June–October 1918), Minister of Public Buildings, Roads and Public Domains (1930–1931). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 137–138.

⁹⁸ Ivanova, "On the population growth of the Bulgarian Volk," p. 3.

⁹⁹ Bulgaria's first social insurance law from 1889 targeted only the retirement scheme of teachers. However it was soon extended to cover also priests (1890), state officials, and the military (1891), including their widows and orphaned children. Laws for old age insurance of agricultural workers (men only, excluding widows and children), craftsmen (men only, excluding widows and children), and merchants (both sexes) were introduced as late as 18 February 1941, 27 February 1941 and 16 April 1943, respectively. For further details, see Nikola Konstantinov, *Sotsialnota Osiguruvane v Búlgariia, 1888–1951* [Social Insurance in Bulgaria, 1888–1951] (Sofia: Natsionalen Osiguritelni Institut, 2001), pp. 11–61.

¹⁰⁰ Pregnancy, delivery, and postnatal expenses of female industrial workers only (based on the tripartite system of state, employer's and employee's contributions) had been covered under the insurance scheme of "Motherhood and Sickness" since 1924. For further details, see Konstantinov, *Social Insurance in Bulgaria*, p. 47.

Professor Shumanov, co-editor in chief of the *Medico-Pedagogical Journal*, went further in his analysis by differentiating among the falling birth rates of the different social groups, and examining the underlying factors.¹⁰¹ Fertility decrease was the highest among officials and the intelligentsia—a fact that, in addition, raised the problem of the qualitative deterioration of future generations. Employment instability, low wages, and extreme job competition among highly-qualified experts in a limited market were the major factors for the fertility check among the well-educated. Second came the working class, whose situation was further aggravated by women's participation in the labor market and the absence of organized child-care. The agricultural population was still leading in its fertility, yet higher birth rates in the countryside were countered by higher infant mortality rates. The combination of the low productivity of the sub-divided land and falling market prices for agricultural products made life even more difficult. Bulgaria's culturally advanced districts had the lowest birth rates but also the highest population density. It was only the mountain people whose lifestyle seemed as "care-free as that of birds".¹⁰² Yet, they combined a substantial birth rate with a primitive level of subsistence.

Once economic adversities and privation were identified as the major ailment hindering Bulgaria's population reproduction, positive socio-economic measures became the principal solution proposed to combat fertility decrease. Any approach of piecemeal relief was ruled out as inadequate and substandard for Bulgarian circumstances. State initiatives in the welfare field, close to the idea of the building up of a social welfare state, was perceived as the key remedy for cushioning economic malaise and boosting the fertility level. Feminist Dimitrana Ivanova recommended sliding wages according to the number of children (born, adopted, or acknowledged), maternity premiums for every new-born infant and special legal provisions for both working mothers and fathers to shield them from redundancy and if necessary, guarantee them privileges in their job search. Large, *mnogodetni* families, too, were to be encouraged with certain privileges, such as tax relief, cheap medical care, and housing entitlement. These "broad social measures" were to be supplemented by compulsory educational courses for

¹⁰¹ V. Shumanov, "Po prirūsta na naselenieto u nas" [On the population growth in our country], *Medico-Pedagogical Journal*, No. 6–7 (March–January 1939), pp. 358–359.

¹⁰² V. Shumanov, "On the population growth in our country," pp. 358–359.

schoolgirls in the fourteen to sixteen age range, in order to prepare them for future motherhood. An increased national income and an intensified economic life were to become the foundation for achieving the desired demographic goal.¹⁰³

Professor Shumanov, too, voiced the need for a comprehensive social policy for the family to fight the birth decline. A law was required to provide protection for pregnant women and illegitimate children in Bulgaria,¹⁰⁴ to organize child-care and house-chore facilities for working mothers, and grant privileges to children from a large family background. Legal provisions were to be enacted to guarantee low-interest marriage loans to newlywed couples, bonuses for every third and further child, while job privileges and tax relief were assured to parents of large families. The need for a special fund was repeatedly voiced to promote these ends. The funds were to be raised from the introduction of a bachelor tax.¹⁰⁵ Last but not least, state propaganda was to promote the glory of motherhood both amongst women and in the public.

Following the same line of reasoning, Professor Ianulov's meticulously structured response to Konsulov's article encouraged favorable socio-economic state intervention in favor of large families and birth increase. Family allowances, family wages, or family pensions according to the number of supported members in the family; lump sums either as birth premiums or marriage loans; tax relief for large families; social, medical, and cultural support to children in the form of food, clothing, education, health, and professional training were measures intended to encourage large families.¹⁰⁶ These, however, in Ianulov's words, were only supplementary provisions, which would yield little result if not complemented with a national, economic, financial, and social program aimed at increasing the general national income. The latter had to be largely redirected to guarantee a decent income of those whose means were insufficient, yet whose families were usually

¹⁰³ Ivanova, "On the population growth of the Bulgarian Volk," p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Shumanov made his appeal in 1939, i.e., before the Health Law was amended in favor of all pregnant women in May 1940 and before the Law for Children Born Outside Wedlock and Their Avowal was amended to grant restricted paternity suit rights to single mothers in November 1940.

¹⁰⁵ V. Shumanov, "Kakva e nashata razhdaemsot v tsifri. Triabva da se sūzdade kult kŭm mnogodetstvoto" [Our birth rates in numbers: The need for cultivating a *mnogodetni*, large family cult], *Dnes* [Today], No. 690 (20 May 1938), p. 6; "On the population growth in our country," p. 359.

¹⁰⁶ Iliia Ianulov, "Razhdaemostta i mnogodetnite semeistva v Bŭlgaria" [Reproduction rates and large, *mnogodetni* families in Bulgaria], *Medico-Pedagogical Journal*, No. 6–7 (March–April, 1939), pp. 323–336.

large. Such were “the broad population masses.”¹⁰⁷ In his view, a state plan was required to fight speculation and to lower the prices of everyday goods, to rationalize the distribution system, and to minimize indirect taxes, which weighed most heavily on large families. It was the burden of indirect taxes which Ianulov blamed most for the deteriorating birth rate:

Indirect taxes are the worst enemy of large, child-rich families and the most substantial cause of the fertility decline as they are not proportionate to earnings; the broad masses of the people are the major consumers of everyday products of immediate necessity, which bear the highest value added tax. Securing the existence minimum has become a goal hard to achieve.¹⁰⁸

Yet, Ianulov insisted on a clear differentiation between pronatalist aspirations and concerns for the large families, which he approached as two separate and independent problems. The protection of large families accorded with the basic principle of social solidarity and was part of the struggle against misery, degeneration, and despair. To guarantee employment, decent living conditions, and social security against all sorts of hazards and risks was a practical expression of social solidarity, without which the state and society would be endangered. The disconcerting decline in the reproduction rate, however, went beyond the issues of social justice and social peace, and entered the field of concern for the biological and international security of the nation and the state. Pronatalism was among other things an expression of anxiety about the future and the very existence of the nation itself. It included the establishment of national programs aimed at encouraging higher birth rates and decreasing infant mortality rates.¹⁰⁹

Compared to Ianulov's, the suggestions of Dr Ivan Moskov, Associate Professor of Forensic Medicine at Sofia University, were less ambitious and socially far-reaching. Yet, as he was also a member of the commission in charge of drafting a pronatalist bill, his views might serve as a reflexion of the nature and the possible state provisions set in the bill in progress.

Overall, Moskov advocated racial hygiene and health improvement as major factors to boost the biological capacity of the race and hence to

¹⁰⁷ Ianulov, “Reproduction rates and large, *mnogodetni* families in Bulgaria,” p. 334.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

increase its natural population growth. This was linked to the necessity for changes in that section of the Exarchate Statute which dealt with matrimony and matrimonial regulations. Health requirements, under the form of a pre-nuptial medical certificate, were to be introduced and certain amendments in the divorce regulations made. Moskov did not specify whether divorce procedures were supposed to be eased or, on the contrary, enhanced.

Moskov advocated the provision of alimony payments for illegitimate children but also stricter anti-abortion regulations. Among the suggested positive pronatalist incentives were tax relief for families with more than three children, a communal land gift of 0.1 hectares to each new-born child, and the organization of an autonomous fund to support large families, under the control of either the Directorate of People's Health or the Ministry of the Interior itself. It was to be financed from the annual state budget through additional taxation. The final Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families, voted in 1943, clearly adopted these provisions.

However, there were also voices which questioned the need for special pronatalist legislation in Bulgaria, thus challenging the idea of the need to promote fertility and insisting instead on an intensified program of racial hygiene. Prof. Geraskov, a professor of education and a left-wing activist,¹¹⁰ argued that reproduction of all biological organisms, the human species included, required a specific amount of food supply and a set of favorable biological conditions to exist and to reproduce.¹¹¹ Since antiquity people had regulated their fertility according to the favors of their natural environment—good harvests inspired more marriages, and hence, more children; rich and spacious habitats encouraged natural population growth, whereas the onset of unfavorable living conditions had motivated Plato to advocate abortion among the ancient Greeks.¹¹² Contemporary Europe was undergoing a process of fertility decline, yet it was also accompanied by popula-

¹¹⁰ Mikhail Geraskov (1874–1957): PhD in Philosophy and Pedagogy (Switzerland); Professor in Education Studies (Sofia, 1924–1940); member of the Russian Socio-Democratic Party (a party in exile in Switzerland). For further details, see *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, II (1981), pp. 87.

¹¹¹ M. Geraskov, "Razhdaemost i otglezhdane na potomstvoto" [Reproduction and rearing of offspring], *Medico-Pedagogical Journal*, No. 1 (October 1938), p. 8.

¹¹² As indicated, Geraskov had based his argument on data taken from I.L. Ussing, *Erziehung und Jugendunterricht bei den Griechen und Römern* [Education and child rearing among the Ancient Greeks and Romans] (Berlin, 1885), p. 23. Ancient Greek philosophers, and Plato and Aristotle, in particular, considered the question of optimum size in their discussions of the ideal conditions of a city-state in which human potentials could be fully developed. Securing "a good life" called for a population large enough to be economically

tion growth because of the massively improved living conditions, its mortality decline and increase of life expectancy of its population. All in all, the numerous colonies and colonial markets of other European nations absorbed its industrial products and saved its ageing population from running the risk of starvation. The decrease in fertility provided no danger there.¹¹³ Bulgaria's demographic conditions were different though. The demographic landscape was dominated by its young generations under the age of thirty, who represented sixty-one per cent of the total population. The country was agricultural, with a poorly developed industry and no colonial outlets. Bulgaria's territory was already densely populated—with circa sixty-two inhabitants per square kilometer—figures which Geraskov (reminiscent of Dr Zagorov's arguments), found rather disconcerting for a population which was self-sufficient, with few outside resources and completely dependent on farming. Quantity was not to be mistaken with quality; a numerous population would not necessarily indicate a prosperous society. A massively increased population density could disturb the equilibrium of well-being and trigger a fight for survival and strife for territorial expansion, which would ultimately lead to wars. Wars, however, did not guarantee a victory, but definitely brought with them suffering, deprivation, human loss and cultural damage. Geraskov believed that the success of a country was bound to the quality of its citizens rather than to mere numbers of population.¹¹⁴ If the current agricultural reproduction rates were maintained and the economy continued to grow, Bulgaria's land capacity could comfortably absorb a population increase up to a density of 70–75 inhabitants per square kilometer. Depopulation, in Geraskov's view, would become a danger only if the agricultural fertility rates fell to one or two

self-sufficient and capable of military self-defense, and the possession of enough territory to supply for the needs of the people. Should, however, the population grow too large and thus threaten its optimum size, Plato and Aristotle recommended its reduction by either means of territory expansion and colonization, or alternatively, by fertility and birth checks, such as abortion and child exposure. By citing Plato and proposing abortion-based approaches towards population regulation, Geraskov implicitly took a pacifist stance, accepting Bulgaria's territorial "status quo" and ruled out potential warfare on the part of Bulgaria. For further details on ancient Hellenic views on population issues, see Joseph J. Spengler, "History of population theories," in Julian Lincoln Simons (ed.), *The Economics of Population* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick—London, 1998), pp. 3–16, here p.4.

¹¹³ Geraskov, "Reproduction and rearing of offspring," pp. 9–11. As indicated by the author, he was following the reasoning of Roderich v. Ungern-Sternberg, in "Die Abnahme der Sterblichkeit im Westeuropäischen Kulturkrisis" [Mortality decrease and the cultural crisis in Western Europe], *Die Ned. Welt*, No. 27 (1938).

¹¹⁴ Geraskov, "Reproduction and rearing of offspring," pp. 11–13.

children per couple, and thus birth rates dropped to or below the mortality level. According to his observations on peasants', workers', and craftsmen's fertility in Bulgaria, depopulation was not a process which the country had to fear yet, though birth rates were decreasing among the intelligentsia and seemed to negatively influence the size of the other social groups, too.¹¹⁵

Following this line of reasoning, Geraskov suggested adopting a differentiated population policy in Bulgaria. The prime target group of such a policy was the agricultural population, which due to its close contact with nature was thought to be eugenically and nationally the fittest for parenthood. Instead of a pronatalist approach, he recommended measures to guarantee social security in the rural countryside—i.e., provisions which would keep peasants in good health—and upgrade the living conditions of the other social groups. Such were activities to improve parents' health, to guarantee their employment and create a general sense of security for the life and the future of their offspring. Re-echoing Zagorov's earlier considerations, Geraskov felt that if infant mortality rates were reduced to the levels of those in Norway, Holland, or Switzerland (39, 40, and 49 per thousand live births respectively), the percentage of the young population would rise, and so would Bulgaria's population growth in general.¹¹⁶

Georgi Draganov, secretary of the Bulgarian Union for Child Protection, and Dr V. Shumanov (partly) shared similar ideas.¹¹⁷ Draganov observed that the Balkan countries, Bulgaria included, manifested resolutely positive growth tendencies even when no specific pronatalist measures had so far been adopted by their governments.

Table 4.7. Comparative population growth (%) in Europe and in the Balkans¹¹⁸

	Birth rates	Mortality rates	Population growth
Czechoslovakia	18.8	13.5	5.3
Poland	26.6	14.3	12.3
Denmark	17.7	10.8	6.9
Hungary	21.7	15.3	6.4

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 11–13.

¹¹⁷ Georgi Draganov, "Anketi na vestnik *Mir*" [Surveys of the *World*], *World*, No. 11512 (13 December 1938), p. 3; Shumanov, "On the population growth in our country," pp. 358–9.

¹¹⁸ Draganov, "Surveys of the *World*," p. 3.

	Birth rates	Mortality rates	Population growth
Italy	23.1	13.7	9.4
Germany	17.1	11.3	5.8
France	16.0	15.5	0.5
England [<i>sic</i>]	14.8	12.0	2.8
Bulgaria	28.3	14.8	13.5
Greece	28.9	16.1	12.8
Romania	32.8	20.6	12.2
Yugoslavia	30.8	17.2	13.6

The beneficial—in Draganov’s view—demographic trend had to be maintained and stabilized; hence, modernized public healthcare policies and improved social hygiene were seen as the proper Balkan approach to curb their countries’ infant mortality and increase population growth.¹¹⁹ “If the Balkan countries manage to raise their child care provisions to the level of the European states, their mortality rates would definitely decrease, while their natural growth would increase.”¹²⁰ In Draganov’s opinion, what was until then termed the Bill for Encouraging Birth Rates and was then still in the process of being drafted, had to articulate both its final target and its correspondingly adopted approach. Hence it would be better renamed into a Bill for the Preservation and Increase of the Nation.¹²¹

THE IMAGE OF THE “NEW” FAMILY

The first ideological interpretation of the family as “the basic cell of society” dates back to 1937, i.e., to the year when the first alarmed outcry on birth rates appeared in *People’s Health*. Doctors and women activists were invited to promote the new vision of the family on *Radio Sofia*, and the ideological construction of the family was permeated by a rising feeling of nationalism. Mrs Liuba Todorova and Mrs Rada Golemanova¹²² defined the strong and healthy family as the foundation of a morally and economically strong soci-

¹¹⁹ Draganov, “Surveys of the World,” p. 3; Shumanov, “On the population growth in our country,” p. 358.

¹²⁰ Draganov, “Surveys of the World,” p. 3.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² It has not proved possible to locate further information about Todorova and Golemanova, even though Rada Golemanova was a long-term contributor to the *Women’s Voice*, the newspaper of the Bulgarian Women’s Union.

ety and state,¹²³ comparing it to the very “hearth of national power”¹²⁴ and to “the cradle”¹²⁵ of the nation’s future forces. Hence, a stable family was seen as a necessary prerequisite for personal and, especially, for social and national happiness. This was why parents had to be prepared for their parenthood: they were the role models and, consequently, the decisive factor which would shape their children’s views and, hence, the nature of society as a whole.¹²⁶

According to Mr Damian Dimov, traditions, perceived as a form of social heritage, passed down age-old wisdom through the generations and ought to be the foundation of upbringing and education.¹²⁷ To fight them as a manifestation of backwardness and conservatism was a narrow and quite wrong-minded attitude; in their very essence they were a reservoir of folk customs, a manifestation of the *Volk*’s soul and hence a living embodiment of history. Older generations epitomized traditions best—they were in a position to warn young couples from rash decisions¹²⁸ and create for their grandchildren a natural environment.

Whereas the modernist literature of the 1920s had attempted to emancipate young mothers from the “backward” and frequently “harmful” influence of elderly kin, grandparents now became a valuable family asset. In 1931, Prof. Georgi Danailov had attributed the commonness of large Bulgarian households (with five to nine members living and eating together) to the population’s “lower culture” and its agricultural mode of life.¹²⁹ By 1937, however, the ideological standpoint towards large households had changed considerably and the three-generation family was promoted as the ideal to be followed. According to Dr Botio Shanov and Mr Dimov, the three-generation family presupposed the presence of more than two children and a

¹²³ Liuba Todorova, “Semeistvoto kato ognishte na natsionalna mosht” [The family as the hearth of national power], F. 178, op. 5, a.e. 162, ll. 16–17, broadcast on *Radio Sofia* in 1937 (date missing); Rada Golemanova, “Noviat pūt na semeistvoto” [The family’s new path], F. 178, op. 5, a.e. 132, ll. 1–6, broadcast on *Radio Sofia* in 1937 (date missing).

¹²⁴ Todorova, “The family as the hearth of national power,” ll. 16–17.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 16.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Damian Dimov, “Traditsiata kato osnova na obrazovaniето” [Tradition as the foundation of education], F. 178, op. 5, a.e. 162, ll. 81–83, *Radio Sofia* broadcast on 23 September 1941.

¹²⁸ Golemanova, “The family’s new path,” l. 2.

¹²⁹ Georgi Danailov, *Izsledvania vŭrkhu Demografiata na Bŭlgaria* [A study of Bulgaria’s demography] (Sofia, 1931), pp. 41–43. Yet, it should be noted that since the Balkan wars and the subsequent First World War the number of members in the five-to-nine-member households had been decreasing rapidly, increasingly giving way to one-member and two-member households. For further details, see Chankov, *The Population of Bulgaria*, pp. 148–152.

stable link with the elderly. Thus created, the close relationship between children, parents, and grandparents would spread throughout their community and permeate society in general.¹³⁰ It was feared that families with one or two children would breed spoiled, anti-social offspring, while embittered children born outside wedlock might well fail to integrate socially and hence could endanger society as a whole.¹³¹

There was no greater ornament of a home than the rosy cheeks and joyful laughter of its children, asserted certain women activists to their radio audience.¹³² A marriage presupposed parenthood, the latter being both a prerogative and a social duty. Parenthood became a state-generated necessity. "If there were no parents, there would be no citizens, and if there were no citizens, there would be no strong and mighty state."¹³³ Ancient Rome became a role model to be followed, as its days had been full of glory precisely because its mothers had watched over their little ones. Todorova pointed out that Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi brothers,¹³⁴ had seen in her children her most precious jewels, and these "treasures" of hers had taken the Roman *Volk* to the heights of its cultural development.¹³⁵

As early as 1937, the family was endowed with social and national duties—a tendency which continued through to the early 1940s. A strong and healthy family was expected to raise a morally and physically vigor-

¹³⁰ Dimov, "Tradition as the foundation of education," l. 83; D. Dimitrov, "Podgotviane za semen zhivot" [Preparations for family life], *Medico-Pedagogical Journal*, No. 4 (January 1943), p. 224.

¹³¹ Botio Shanov, "Greshkite na bashkata i maikata pri vŭzpitanieto na detsata" [Parental mistakes in child raising], F. 178, op. 5, a.e. 17, l. 72, broadcast on *Radio Sofia* on 5 September 1941.

¹³² Todorova, "The family as the hearth of national power," l. 17.

¹³³ Golemanova, "The family's new path," l. 17.

¹³⁴ The Gracchi brothers, Tiberius and Gaius, second century B.C., were Roman statesmen and social reformers, sons of the consul Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus and Cornelia, the daughter of Scipio Africanus. Their mother was said to have been one of Rome's most cultured women. She had had Tiberius and Gaius educated in a way that emphasized public duty, the maintenance of godliness, and the "divine spark of reason" in men. The brothers' social reforms included the redistribution of public land amongst the poor, grain provisions for the poor at a low price, the reduction of the period of military service, the right of people to appeal jury verdicts, as well as the addition to the senators serving on juries of an equal number of knights. The brutal murder of Tiberius by the senators in 133 B.C. was said to have sent shock waves through the entire structure of the Roman state of such magnitude that their effects was to be felt for generations. Yet Tiberius's reforms were continued and later enacted by Gaius. It is noteworthy that a number of the reforms advocated and passed by the Gracchi brothers had also a direct appeal to the majority of Bulgaria's population in the late 1930s as they referred to urgent contemporary issues such as social support for the needy and the need for land reform in favor of the poor. Clearly, the symbolic language of pronatalist appeals was also meant to make reference to broader social problems.

For further details on the Gracchi brothers see <http://www.barca.fsnet.co.uk/gracchi.htm>; last accessed 28 March 2009.

¹³⁵ Todorova, "The family as the hearth of national power" l. 17.

ous offspring, which, for its part, assumed a sincere relationship between spouses, based on a clean prenuptial sexual background and moral trust. The arranging of prenuptial medical certificates and marriage counseling were recommended in order to avoid the transmission of hereditary risks. A healthy family presumed a conscious choice of responsibilities and sacrifice, which both partners were ready to undergo in their hearts in order to establish an unbreakable, life-long union.¹³⁶

By the late 1930s early marriages, i.e., under the age of sixteen–seventeen for girls and under eighteen for men, had come to be regarded as an unwelcome “traditional” phenomenon in Bulgarian society, especially from a eugenic point of view (this standpoint would be further sustained in the body of the text of the future pronatalist Law of the Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families). At the beginning of the 1940s, however, a clear-cut change of public attitude occurred once the issue of pronatalism was placed on the public agenda. *People’s Health* became the most ardent supporter of the new vision, hinting at the dangers of delayed marriages and on the medical complications accompanying motherhood at a late age. Tradition in the form of *Volk* wisdom was invoked: Dr T. Pelovski recalled a popular folk saying, “Marry young or enter a monastery.”¹³⁷ In his opinion, singles were mere consumers who had opted to prefer their personal comfort and to avoid family and children. Yet, once old, it was predicted that they would lapse into remorse and feel “lonely and forgotten, an unwanted stranger to everybody.”¹³⁸ Elderly brides and bridegrooms were undesirable phenomena as they were likely to be stuck in their old habits and thus fail to compromise with each other. In contrast, a young person was held to be more flexible in perceptions and attitudes, and hence more capable of adjustment to new routines and ways. This was expected to ensure that marriage remained a “union of love and mutual respect” and not turn into “a nest of hatred and misery.”¹³⁹ The earlier the marriage, the easier childbirth would be and the healthier the infant, according to the eugenical advise of Mr Pelin Velkov to a female readership. Offspring were the very purpose of matrimony: “What

¹³⁶ Golemanova, “The family’s new path,” l. 4; Shanov, “Parental mistakes in child raising,” ll. 71–75.

¹³⁷ T. Pelovski, “Ili se mlad zheni, ili se mlad kalugeri” [Either marry young or enter a monastery], *People’s Health*, No. 17–18 (15 May 1943), p. 11.

¹³⁸ Pelovski, “Either marry young or enter a monastery,” p. 11.

¹³⁹ Pelin Velkov, “Starite pürveskini” [Late motherhood], *People’s Health*, No. 19–20 (30 May 1943), pp. 7, 11.

do you call a family without children? Nothing. It cannot be called ‘family’ at all, as children are the life cement between spouses, ‘their joy in times of worry, and their concern in times of delight,’” he warned.¹⁴⁰

The editor of the *People’s Health*, Zakhari Zakhariev, much like Ivan Rusev, Minister of the Interior and People’s Health in Aleksandŭr Tsankov’s cabinets (September 1923–January 1926) and later member of the Military League,¹⁴¹ asserted that children were the primary personal and social duty of each young Bulgarian woman. Emancipation, as preached by “certain party and political adherents,” would lead to the masculinization of women and expose them to danger on the streets and to moral jeopardy. “Fortunately, for our Bulgarian pride and admiration,” Zakhariev assured his readers, Bulgarian women faithfully followed the century-long national belief which linked home, children, and happiness. In Zakhariev’s view, Bulgarian women knew that marriage alone could bestow on them children and thus help them physically and morally to “blossom into their true feminine beauty.” Most important, however, was the bond between true womanhood, the family and the nation: “Finally, Bulgarian maidens know that the family is the nation’s firmest stronghold, the treasury of the Bulgarian language, religion, and customs, as well as the healthiest support of the Bulgarian state, in which freedom and independence guarantee the welfare and progress of all Bulgarians.”¹⁴²

Female intellectuals, adherents of the new, ultra-right ideology and of the German “conservative revolution,” backed the tide of anti-emancipation sermons. Highlighting the collapse of the Soviet family model and of Marxism in general, Mrs Fani Popova-Mutafova, a distinguished writer and intellectual,¹⁴³ appealed to Bulgarian women to return to the merits of embracing marriage, children, and family.¹⁴⁴ Overburdened working

¹⁴⁰ Velkov, “Late motherhood,” p. 7.

¹⁴¹ See Ivan Rusev, *Obshtestveni i Politicheski Misli* [Reflections on society and politics] (Sofia, 1941), pp. 81–86.

¹⁴² Dr Zakhari Zakhariev, “Sŭvremeniat dŭlg na maikata” [The contemporary duty of mothers], *People’s Health*, No. 3–4 (30 January 1942), pp. 6–7.

¹⁴³ Fani Popova-Mutafova (1902–1977). The most prominent of the few writers of historical fiction in Bulgaria and one of the most celebrated and published Bulgarian women authors of the interwar period; she was subject to political repression after the communist takeover in September 1944 as she was held responsible for “Great-Bulgarian chauvinism and fascism.” For further details, see Krassimira Daskalova, “A life in history (Fani Popova-Mutafova),” *Gender and History*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2002), pp. 321–339.

¹⁴⁴ For a further overview of ongoing debates on women and gender relations in the period and from different perspectives, as seen through the eyes of the contemporaries, see chapter VI: “Diskursite vŭrhu zhenite” [Discourses on women], in Daskalova (ed.), *From the Shadow of History: Women in Bulgarian Society and Culture (1840s–1940s)*, pp. 306–437.

women were running the danger of losing their chances for personal fulfillment and of remaining single, childless, or with just one child in life. Misconstrued emancipation was diverting women from the domestic realm and reducing the reproduction pattern down to a two- and even one-child model.¹⁴⁵ Yet, the present times were rekindling Bulgaria's rightful expectations to have her national grandeur restored. History was endowing Bulgarian women with a sacred duty to their nation: to "fill up empty homes, repopulate depopulated places, and regenerate the names of distinguished kinships."¹⁴⁶ However, to do so, it was the state's responsibility to shield children and the family and place them under state protection, by bolstering fathers' income, guaranteeing housewives a well-deserved "mother's wage," and raising the ethnic spirit of Bulgarian mothers in general.¹⁴⁷

4. Early parliamentary alarm about birth decline

General Nikola Nedev, Minister of the Interior and People's Health (14 November 1938–15 February 1940),¹⁴⁸ was one of the first contributors to the official parliamentary debate which would link the importance of large families to the common good of the state and nation. Commenting on the state budget for the Directorate of People's Health before the National Assembly on 4 January 1939, Nedev appealed to have the budget raised in favor of large families. He declared:

It is the supreme duty of each Bulgarian to leave offspring behind. Nobody can nor should take advantage of the state and the nation without paying them back. Those who would like to leave offspring and thus fulfill their responsibility towards the nation should be assisted to do so by the state. This is why

¹⁴⁵ Fani Popova-Mutafova, "Po novi pütishta" [On new paths], in Krassimira Daskalova (ed.), *From the Shadow of History*, pp. 377–382, here pp. 381–382.

¹⁴⁶ Fani Popova-Mutafova, "Idei, nasoki, vüzpitanie, novi dni, predstoiashti zadachi" [Ideas, directions, new times, forthcoming duties], in Daskalova (ed.), *From the Shadow of History*, pp. 383–386, here p. 385.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 384–386; "Kakvo zhenata e spechelila i kakvo tia e zagubila süs svojata ematsipatsiia" [What women gained and lost with their emancipation], in Daskalova (ed.), pp. 371–376, here p. 373.

Popova-Mutafova's articles were originally published in the journals *Filisofski Pregled* [Philosopher's review], *Prolom* [Breakthrough], *Naroden Vodach* [The people's leader], and her collection, *Novata Bülgarka* [The new Bulgarian woman] in the period 1934–1942.

¹⁴⁸ General Nikola Nedev (1886–1970): Minister of the Interior and People's Health (November 1938–October 1939, October 1939–February 1940). See further Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 317–318.

we should give a hand to the large, *mnogodetni* families, i.e., to families with three and more children. They will be given benefits at the expense of those who refuse to leave progeny.¹⁴⁹

Typically for the early 1939 parliamentary discussions, anxieties about the falling birth rates still appealed to a combination of social hygiene measures and pronatalist solutions. The debates intertwined fear of fertility decrease, concerns about the general level of the population's health, infant mortality, the sanitary conditions in the country, the desperate poverty of the people, and also Bulgaria's geographic situation and "historical mission," which required a "healthy and strong" state.¹⁵⁰ Debates were conducted within the framework of heated discussions focused on the low budget of the Directorate of People's Health and encompassed parliamentary pressure for a firmer state intervention for the sake of the population's declining health.¹⁵¹ Birth rates were seen as the primary constituent element of the nation's health, and the latter was defined as the "most important part of national capital," "the first prerequisite for the proper and prosperous development of a people."¹⁵² Hence, a birth decrease of fifty per cent in comparison to the pre-war period (1906) was perceived as dangerous and leading towards "degeneration."¹⁵³ A moment was foreseen within the following thirty years when the rate of population growth would be reduced to half its current rate¹⁵⁴ or would cease altogether.¹⁵⁵ This, moreover, was believed to endanger national defense.¹⁵⁶ The development was interpreted as affecting both urban and rural areas, and the demographic situation of the country was compared to a losing enterprise, which no longer generated profit but was consuming its capital instead.¹⁵⁷ Bankruptcy and catastrophe were predicted to follow if no timely measures were taken to stop the process.

¹⁴⁹ Speech of N. Nedev, *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, I RS*, 36 M (11 January 1939), p. 735.

¹⁵⁰ Speech of Petür Ialamov, *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, I RS*, 35 M (4 January 1939), pp. 703–710.

¹⁵¹ Speech of Stefan Tsanov, *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, I RS*, 35 M (3 January 1939), p. 674.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 674.

¹⁵³ Speech of Boris Daskalov, *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, I RS*, 35 M (4 January 1939), p. 711; see also speech of Ivan Rusev, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, I RS*, 9 M (12 March 1940), p. 155; Speech of Nikola Sakarov, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, I RS*, 29 M (12 April 1940), p. 705.

¹⁵⁴ Speech of Iv. Rusev, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, I RS*, 9 M (12 March 1940), p. 155.

¹⁵⁵ Speech of B. Daskalov, *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, I RS*, 35 M (4 January 1939), p. 711.

¹⁵⁶ Speech of N. Sakarov, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, I RS*, 29 M (12 April 1940), p. 705.

¹⁵⁷ Speech of B. Daskalov, *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, I RS*, 35 M (4 January 1939), p. 711.

Social and economic deprivation of the population was acknowledged as being responsible for the decline of birth rates. People could hardly take care of their own lives, and hence, had no real chance to bring up and look after more offspring. Deputy Stefan Tsanov cited a peasant's response to a popular lecture on pronatalism. Once, during Turkish rule, a father who had been pushed into *angaria*¹⁵⁸ for over twenty years, preferred to kill his son rather than let him follow the same plight. "You, at least, won't be slaving," he had said in justification.¹⁵⁹

"Impoverishment, painful attempts to make both ends meet, misery, low wages, and salaries—these are the major factors for families to abstain from births and for induced abortions to flourish," said Dr Daskalov, appealing on 4 January 1939 to the conscience of the members of the National Assembly. "Whereas families with seven or eight children used to be no rare phenomena in the past, and there were eleven of us at my home, now two or three children prove to be in excess under the present conditions."¹⁶⁰ He complemented his statement with numerous statistical data, provided by the Statistical Office and cited in the newspapers.¹⁶¹

As a countermeasure against the threatening demographic catastrophe envisaged in the late 1930s and the 1940s, Dr Daskalov pointed to the provisions which he and his fellow members of Parliament, Drandarevski and Gatev, had made in their self-drafted Bill for Promoting and Increasing Fertility (1938). Amongst the measures to be brought to the attention of the National Assembly were suggestions to exempt aborting women from legal penalties, to introduce obstetrical assistance for all women at delivery, and impose heavy tax penalties on bachelors. Last but not least, came the formation of a new, independent Ministry of People's Health.¹⁶²

Daskalov argued that the existing Penalty Law held both aborting women and abortionists responsible for the act, and thus turned them into accomplices. If however, women were freed from legal penalty, the

¹⁵⁸ *Angaria*—the Greek form of a Babylonian word, which in the 4th c. came to denote a generally compulsory service to the emperor. In medieval Latin it assumed the meaning of any service forcibly or unjustly demanded, and of oppression in general. In Bulgaria, it was associated with the plight of the Bulgarian population in the Ottoman Empire, denoting enforced labor slavery.

¹⁵⁹ Speech of Stefan Tsanov, *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, IRS*, 35 M (3 January 1939), p. 675.

¹⁶⁰ Speech of B. Daskalov, *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, IRS*, 35 M (4 January 1939), p. 711; Speech of N. Sakarov, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IRS*, 29 M (12 April 1940), p. 705.

¹⁶¹ Speech of B. Daskalov, *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, IRS*, 35 M (4 January 1939), p. 711.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 711–712.

entire responsibility for the criminal act would fall on the abortionists and the latter would think twice before offering their services. In his opinion, medicalized abortion went hand in hand with the higher level of economic and cultural well-being of the better-off part of the population as, unlike the poor, it was the wealthy who had the means to pay for it. It was “a public secret” that the poverty-ridden peripheral urban households had four or five children whereas the schools in the prosperous central quarters were empty.

Daskalov considered reproduction a natural and inborn human drive. Fertility restrictions were the outcome either of inborn illnesses (impotence) or of advanced civilization, which taught people to avoid large families. Unlike the demographers, he acknowledged personal reproductive egoism as part of Bulgaria's reality, yet mostly on the part of “old” bachelors. Hence men who conscientiously embraced the state of bachelordom had to be punished legally, by introducing marriage requirements for central and local governmental employees—a suggestion which was heartily applauded by some deputies.¹⁶³ Daskalov envisaged a six-month period of grace for all single male state and municipal officials to enter into matrimony. Once this period was over, punitive taxation measures—up to fifty per cent on the incomes of all bachelors above a certain age limit (twenty-six or thirty-two depending on their secondary education or university degree, respectively) was to be enforced. The accumulated funds were to be distributed as premiums among large, *mnogodetni* families. State officials with families were privileged with extra cash benefits per family member, a measure justified as part of a pronatalist incentive scheme. The actual provisions of Daskalov's Bill, however, aimed to provide social support for large families. The preamble to the 1938 Bill for Promoting and Increasing Fertility posited a complex of factors as responsible for the “annual degeneration and population decrease.”¹⁶⁴ The “total impoverishment of the broad people's masses” was an issue addressed alongside the “harmful agitation on the part of so-called modernists—the worst enemy of population growth.”¹⁶⁵ However, there was no reference to specify who the “so-called modernists” could be.

¹⁶³ See *Minutes of the XXIVth ONA, I RS*, 35 M (4 January 1939), p. 711.

¹⁶⁴ “Zakonoproekt za Uvelichavane i Nasŭrtchavane na Razhdaemostta” [Bill for Promoting and Increasing Fertility], in *Appendix to the XXIVth ONA, I ES*, 31 M, p. 32.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Drafted several years before the time when a free mother-and-child health service, family allowances, and an old-age retirement scheme were introduced in Bulgarian society between 1940 and 1943, Daskalov's bill foretold how acutely they were needed. According to its provisions, parents of large families were to be entitled to a 2000-lev lump-sum payment at the birth or the marriage of a child and a 300-lev monthly pension from the age of sixty. With this came entitlement to free railway fares three times a year, to free hospital, sanatorium, and state-owned spa services, free school education for their children, and employment privileges.

Free, specialized medical assistance was an important part of the proposed legal arrangements. The introduction of a free obstetric service was vital for protecting women during delivery, and hence increasing their subsequent fertility and pregnancies. Strong state intervention against tuberculosis, malaria, and other contagious diseases was meant to prevent, or at least check, the extremely high infant mortality rates in the country. These measures were to become a priority for the future Ministry for People's Health, once it had been separated from the Ministry of the Interior.

Daskalov's ideas seemed to have been accepted enthusiastically within political circles, as thirty-six deputies signed the 1938 Bill for Birth Encouragement, one of them being Dimitŭr Saradzhov, the leader-to-be of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents. Vasil Mitakov, Minister of Justice, excitedly commented on it in his *Diary* that it was "an excellent idea." As Mitakov recognized, a nation could increase its power in two ways—either by territorial acquisitions or by population growth. Obviously, Bulgaria had no large territories and, furthermore, was going through a birth decline. This was a clear signal of the nation's inevitable decline, too. Mitakov wholeheartedly believed that as "an act of foresight" the Bill was "absolutely urgent."¹⁶⁶

Despite all political fervor surrounding the Bill, it was never presented for parliamentary discussion. Discussions on falling fertility and rising abortion rates, however, continued to re-emerge in the National Assembly, framed in the context of financial debates related to health and sanitary provisions, and unease over Bulgaria's political situation in the Balkans. In May 1940 and again in January 1941, Dr Ivan Iotov, supporter of the former BANU, underlined the necessity of a state plan for health reform. In his opinion,

¹⁶⁶ Mitakov, *Diary*, pp. 151–152.

state-generated health reorganization was the only way to counter “the terrible degeneration of the Bulgarian people, prevent a further drop of fertility, and reduce the appalling rate of tuberculosis and child mortality” in the country.¹⁶⁷ “Rome was defeated not because of lack of wealth, culture, welfare, army, or munitions, but because of lack of children,” Iotov warned.¹⁶⁸ He cautioned that in terms of birth decline, Bulgaria had already surpassed her neighbors and that the country’s population growth was the slowest in the Balkans. Abortion had become “an everyday phenomenon which carried no legal consequences” and women from Belgrade and Paris were said to resort to the assistance of Sofia doctors to have their pregnancies terminated.¹⁶⁹ Placed in the context of the country’s difficult foreign relations with her neighbors, these data could not leave her statesmen neutral.¹⁷⁰

By 1941, both society and its parliamentary representatives had acknowledged that active intervention on the part of the state was “a must.” State legislation on population coupled to state provisions in the welfare field was greeted as a suitable tool to fight the looming demographic catastrophe and to shield the state before the threat of war.

¹⁶⁷ Speeches of Iv. Iotov, (10 May 1940), p. 1190; (15 January 1941), p. 1035.

¹⁶⁸ Speech of Iv. Iotov, (10 May 1940), p. 1190.

¹⁶⁹ Iotov, (15 January 1941), p. 1035.

¹⁷⁰ Iotov, (10 May 1940), p. 1197.

CHAPTER IV

Activities “from Below”: The League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents



In 1939, a grassroots organization came to the political forefront and became an energetic vehicle for promoting the welfare of child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents and especially, those of poor peasant families. Thriving in increasingly authoritarian times, the League boldly took the initiative to urge the state to intervene in favor of the vast bulk of economically underprivileged citizens by granting child allowances and railway fare and school-tax discounts and by reformulating the tax system to the benefit of large families. More than anything, the League pressed for a more socially just land redistribution, a project subsequently initiated by the state in 1940, and thus came to voice the needs of Bulgaria's economically deprived peasant smallholders and to act as a corrective to corrupting tendencies “from below.” Although the exact extent of its impact on Bulgarian politicians and legislators is an issue for further research to determine, present evidence makes clear that the League's activities were widely acknowledged both in society and in Parliament. It was the League's independence in its decision-making and its actions, and its significant popularity among the wider population, that eventually led to the removal of its chairman and to its complete subjection to the state.

1. Historical overview

The idea of starting an organization to support *mnogodetni* parents with numerous children came originally to Zakhari Zhekov, a Sofia solicitor, in 1933. He and his close friends¹—all of them fathers of large families—

¹ These were Ivan Altemirski, the priest Khristo Novachkov, the writer Ivan Kirilov, and Todor Petrov.

gathered over the next two years (1934–1935) once a week to draw up the program and ideological framework of what would become the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents.² In 1939 the League's Constitution, which followed the legal prescriptions for public organizations, was formally approved by General Nedev, Minister of the Interior and People's Health, with Order No. 3574 of 10 July 1939 and was published in the *State Gazette*, No. 210/1939.³ Zhekov became its first chairman, and Altemirski and Father Novachkov members of the executive board. By the end of 1940, however, only the League's leader and chairman, Zhekov, and Novachkov, its vice-chairman, remained from the founding group: Altemirski had withdrawn after a personal misfortune had befallen his family, Petrov had left the capital and Kirilov had passed away.⁴

The League owed its post-1939 development largely to its chairman Zhekov. Friends who had known him for twelve or fifteen years described him as a highly energetic and charismatic figure, gifted with supreme eloquence, whose public speeches could stretch over two and a half hours.⁵ He was said to be self-sacrificing, firm in his objectives and persuasive, dynamic, honest and entirely responsible for what the League turned into, that is, a "great and powerful organization ... respected and authoritative in all circles of society."⁶ In addition, Zhekov was asserted to be also well-connected among the higher governmental circles.⁷ His days allegedly started at three in the morning and his Sofia home became the League's headquarters, where he met members of the organization and sympathizers, occasionally seeing one hundred visitors a day from all over the country.⁸

The League's newspaper, initially called *Mnogodetnik* [Child-rich parent], was apparently started without any outside financial support.⁹ Yet two years later, in May 1941, thanks to the numerous members' subscriptions,

² "Istoricheskia kongres vŭv Veliko Tŭrnovo" [The historic congress in Veliko Tŭrnovo], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 1; the priest Iliia Sergiev, "Da sledvame vodacha ni" [Let's follow our leader], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 10 (1 January 1941), p. 2.

³ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 9 (15 September 1940), p. 2.

⁴ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 13 (20 April 1941), pp. 1–2.

⁵ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 3.

⁶ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 8 (15 May 1940), p. 3.

⁷ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 10 (1 January 1941), p. 2.

⁸ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 13 (20 April 1941), p. 3.

⁹ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 10 (1 January 1941), p. 2.

it had already become a weekly publication.¹⁰ By the end of 1940 approximately one million men, women, and children were reported to be members of the League, organized in over 2,000 branches all over the country,¹¹ while four months later, due to intensive agitation work, the number of branches had increased to 3,000.¹² According to the League's constitution, each village or town had the right to start its own branch of child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents once there were at least eight families with three or more children dwelling there.¹³ However, in view of other reports, the membership numbers presented in *Mnogodetnik* may be overenthusiastic. According to *On the March*, the newspaper of the Committee for Bulgarian Literature, whose editorial came to fervently oppose Zhekov's, the members of the society numbered about 80,000, organized in 1,200 local units,¹⁴ while some parliamentary sources reported a membership of one million, organized in circa 1,500 branches.¹⁵ At the League's congress in Sofia on 26–27 October 1947, the number of branches in the period following the communist takeover on 9 September 1944 was given as 1,338, with an "old" (i.e., pre-9 September 1944) membership of 81,926.¹⁶ Nevertheless, to be fair to the League, it should be noted that by 1945 the political situation in the country had changed, and according to the new leadership's own testimony, many members had already lost their incentives to participate in the League's activities.¹⁷

By July 1941, Zhekov and his followers had managed to organize a dense network of branches embracing both large cities and small villages. Judging by the locations from which *Mnogodetnik*'s correspondents were writing, the network spread over practically the whole of the country. It embraced the north and north-west (covering the districts of Ruse, Sevlievo, Lom, Ferdinand, and Sofia), the central parts (the counties of Plovdiv and Kius-tendil), the southeast (the counties of Varna and Shumen), the southwest

¹⁰ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 14 (22 May 1941), p. 1.

¹¹ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 10 (1 January 1941), p. 2.

¹² *Mnogodetnik*, No. 13 (20 April 1941), pp. 1–2.

¹³ *Entsiklopediia Bŭlgaria* [Encyclopedia Bulgaria] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1988), VI, pp. 578–579.

¹⁴ G.I. Lebedev, "Povikŭt na mnogodetnite roditeli" [The appeal of the *mnogodetni*, child-rich parents], *Pokhod* [On the March], No. 46–47 (24 May 1940), p. 3.

¹⁵ See the speech of Petŭr Savov, *Stenografski Dnevniitsi na XXV Obiknovenoto Narodno Sŭbranie* [Minutes of the XXVth ONA] II *Redovna sesiia* [RS], 28 *Zasedanie* [M] (17 December 1940), p. 610.

¹⁶ *Doklad za Sŭstoianieto na Sŭiuza na Mnogodetnite prez 1946–1947* [Report on the state of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents in 1946–1947] (Sofia, 1947), pp. 3–4, 9.

¹⁷ *Report on the State of the League*, p. 5.

(the county of Burgas), and the south (Khaskovo). Yet as far as the organizational life of the League was concerned, it did not run as smoothly as its initiators might have desired.

The first signs of internal problems appeared in spring 1940 when *Mnogodetnik* accused Todor Iurdanov, a member of the Sofia branch and secretary of the Supreme Court, of attempted financial misuse of the League's resources and of sending numerous defamatory letters to popular newspapers.¹⁸ Although Iurdanov apologized in July 1940, a month later he openly claimed in the Sofia newspaper, *On the March*, that he had been forced to do so. Furthermore, he blamed Zhekov for misinforming the League's members about his activities—no delegation of the *Mnogodetni* had ever visited any minister, nor had any bill for large families proposed by Zhekov ever been submitted to the Parliament.¹⁹ Achievements on which the League prided itself, such as the Land Farm Law that envisaged a privileged treatment for large, *mnogodetni*, families, had been the personal initiative of Ivan Bagrianov,²⁰ the Minister of Agriculture, and Zhekov and his adherents could claim no contribution to it. Zhekov and Zakhari Rainov, the League's new secretary, were referred to as petty criminals and pro-semitic into the bargain, and deserved to be incarcerated.²¹

Iurdanov's accusations were only part of a massive organized attack that K. Stoev, Editor-in-Chief of *On the March*, had been directing against the leader of the *Mnogodetni* League since May 1940.²² It seemed as if *On the March* had been attempting to divert the reading audience of *Mnogodetnik* to itself, by claiming to be the only proper "tribune" representing the interests of child-rich parents.²³ Indeed, a few articles were published addressing the

¹⁸ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 9 (15 September 1940), p. 3.

¹⁹ T. Iurdanov, "Vestnik Pokhod zashtitava interesite na mnogodetnite" [*On the March* in defense of the *mnogodetni's* interests], *On the March*, No. 50–51 (12 July 1940), p. 2.

²⁰ Ivan Bagrianov (1891–1945): deputy at the XXIVth ONA (1938–1939), Minister of Agriculture (Nov. 1938–Feb. 1941), Prime Minister of Bulgaria (June–2 Sept. 1944). As prime minister, Bagrianov started a general political amnesty, repealed all anti-Jewish legislation, and entered negotiations with the Allies. He was tried by the People's Tribunal and executed on 1 Feb. 1945. For further details, see Tasho Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 41–42.

²¹ T. Iurdanov, "Edno osvetlenie kŭm organiziranite chlenove na Süiuz na *mnogodetnite*" [Attempt to clarify things to the members of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents], *On the March*, No. 50–51 (12 July 1940), pp. 2–3.

²² See *On the March*, No. 50–51 (12 July 1940), pp. 2–3; No. 52–53 (31 August 1940), pp. 2–4; No. 66–67 (6 July 1941), pp. 1–2.

²³ *On the March*, No. 48–49 (20 June 1940), p. 3.

problems which large Bulgarian families were facing in their everyday life. Yet, instead of organized self-help “from below,” *On the March* agitated for a governmental solution “from above,” i.e., for a strong state intervention in accordance with the state’s objectives and prerogatives of the moment. An “urgent petition” was submitted to the government in May 1940 to “create as soon as possible a special law to encourage birth rates and marriages and to support *mnogodetni* parents with numerous children.”²⁴ Three months later, Gabrovski, Minister of the Interior and People’s Health, and hailed as “the beloved of the poor, mistreated, broad masses,” was said to “have taken to his heart the appeal of the *mnogodetni*” and to have started preparations for a bill to provide support for all large families.²⁵ In retrospect, it seems as if *On the March* and its circle had been turned into an instrument to interfere with Zhekov’s growing activity and popularity. After all, decades later, *On the March* was described as a “socio-political and cultural newspaper, in the service of pro-German propaganda and pro-governmental positions.”²⁶

As a response to the journalistic aggression towards Zhekov, the editorial of *Mnogodetnik* revealed that the League had had to dismiss Iurdanov as well as his abettors Gavril Staikov, Stoian Statkov, and Tsvetana Kiranova, chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary of the Sofia branch respectively, for their persistent efforts to break the unity of the League and to form a breakaway organization.²⁷ The Tŭrnovo Congress in May 1940 had already condemned the attempts of these three to follow their own, separate policies while misappropriating the finances of the Sofia branch by making their own positions paid ones—with an annual salary which exceeded the annual budget of the branch itself.²⁸ The board of the Sofia branch, however, declared that they had the support of the countryside as well as the backing of Gabrovski, Minister of the Interior and People’s Health in the government of Bogdan Filov newly appointed on 15 February 1940. The League expressed their hopes and belief that the minister of the interior would not interfere in their organizational issues and activities and would

²⁴ G. I. Lebedev, “The appeal of the *mnogodetni*, child-rich parents,” *On the March*, No. 46–47 (24 May 1940), p. 3.

²⁵ “Zakonoproekt za Mnogodetnite na dneven red” [A bill for large, *mnogodetni* families has been placed on the agenda], *On the March*, No. 52–53 (31 August 1940), p. 1.

²⁶ *Bŭlgarski Periodichen Pechat 1844–1944: Anotiran Bibliografski Ukazatel* [Bulgarian mass media editions 1844–1944: An annotated bibliographic reference work], 2 vols. (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1962), II, pp. 159–160.

²⁷ G. Evtimov, “Istinata govori” [The truth speaks], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 11 (6 March 1941), p. 3.

²⁸ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 12 (20 March 1941), pp. 1–2, 3.

not damage the League's unity. *Mnogodetnik* stated that over 600 cables and 1,000 letters were received in support of the League's leader, Zhekov.²⁹

Appeals for solidarity rather than fragmentation were raised by the central executive board, but in vain.³⁰ In July 1941 the state, represented by Minister Gabrovski, took the upper hand. With Order No. 87 of 24 July 1941 the initial executive board was dismissed and *Mnogodetnik* was renamed *Rodna Probuda* [Native awakening].³¹ Dimitŭr Saradzhov, member of Parliament, Dragomir Padarev, legal consultant at the Ministry of the Interior and People's Health, and Atanas Lolov, a Sofia solicitor, were appointed respectively as chairman, secretary-treasurer, and member of the temporary executive board of the League, with the task to "put the League onto a healthy foundation" as "a proof that political power in Bulgaria was not indifferent to fights which could disunite its people and was ready to adopt timely decisive measures."³² Although referred to as "temporary" and charged with the responsibility to organise new elections for representatives of the executive board,³³ the newly appointed League's leadership never did so, but retained their positions until the dramatic political changes of 9 September 1944 triggered by the entry of the Soviet army into Bulgaria and the country's reorientation in the war towards the Allied Powers. Nothing more was heard of Zhekov after the last No. 18 issue of *Mnogodetnik* on 11 July 1941.

The background of these dramatic developments in the League is rather dimly attested as far as documented evidence is concerned, yet not impossible to reconstruct. Indeed, the arguments between the Sofia branch and the central executive board had assumed, or perhaps were made to assume a broad public character. For this meant that they could more easily be labelled as an act of public disorder and consequently became liable to the newly amended Law for the Defense of the Nation as well as the newly passed Civilian Mobilization Law in April 1940. A distinctive manifestation of a breach of the peace was also the demonstration in front of

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 1–2.

³⁰ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 17 (26 June 1941), p. 3.

³¹ "Sŭiuzen zhivot" [News from the League's activities], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 19 (14 September 1941), p. 2.

³² Ivan Apostolov, "Krai na bezpoleznite borbi" [The end of futile brawls], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 19 (14 September 1941), p. 1.

³³ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 19 (14 September 1941), p. 2.

the building of the Ministry of War of five hundred child-rich, *mnogodetni* mothers claiming family benefits for child-rich parents who had been organized by the Sofia branch of the League—the initiative which provoked the final interference of the government into the League’s activities in the form of dismissing its executive board.³⁴ This, however, would not explain why the central executive board was held responsible for an activity of its Sofia branch, especially since Minister Gabrovski was well-informed of the conflict between their leaders. Yet, it should be noted that the executive board’s problems became a public issue just two months after the new minister came to power in February 1940. Gabrovski was one of the four government officials, alongside Prime Minister Filov, Minister of War T. Daskalov, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Popov, whom King Boris consulted frequently at the expense of the other members of Filov’s cabinet.³⁵ He had also his own vision of what the new Law for Large, *Mnogodetni*, Bulgarian Families was supposed to be like. The newly-appointed executive board of the League was soon turned into the vehicle by which Gabrovski’s Law was publicized and presented to the attention of the Parliament.

After the political changes on 9 September 1944, the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents was incorporated into the Fatherland Front and subject to its regulations. Tsvetana Kiranova, the secretary of its Sofia branch and a long-term loyal sympathizer with the new pro-Soviet regime,³⁶ became its new leader until 1948, when the League’s functions were officially taken over by the Fatherland Front and the municipalities, and the League was dissolved.³⁷ By then, the League had been turned into a mere appendix of the Fatherland Front with a mass membership reluctant to participate in any Communist-party-staged events.

³⁴ *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, VI (1988), pp. 578–579. The *Encyclopedia*, however, has mistakenly given 1942 as the year of the state takeover of the League.

³⁵ According to contemporary Bulgarian historians, the other ministers in Filov’s cabinet were often uninformed and taken by surprise by certain decisions the government was held responsible for. See Stelova and Grüncharov, *A History of Bulgaria*, p. 464.

³⁶ Tsvetana Kiranova (1902–date unknown): activist in the Communist Party (since 1921); candidate-member of the Central Committee of the BCP (1944–1952), and secretary of the Bulgarian Women’s Union (1944–1949) and of the Committee of Bulgarian Women (1950–1956). Married to Dr Prokopi Kiranov, politician (BANU), state official (1931–1933), and director of the Statistical Office (1932–1935). For further details, see *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, III (1982), p. 411.

³⁷ See *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, as well as *Stiuz na Mnogodetnite v Bŭlgariia* [The League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents in Bulgaria] (Sofia, 1947).

Yet, the part that the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents played under Zhekov's guidance in shaping legislation committed to the problems and anxieties of Bulgaria's large families should not be underestimated. Despite the numerous attacks against its founder and initial leader, both opponents and sympathizers of Zhekov had to acknowledge openly that he had created a "mighty" union wholeheartedly devoted to the issues of large families.³⁸ Whether such a powerful and well-structured organization could be permitted to continue functioning outside the direct control of a state which was increasingly heading towards political centralization and domination of the executive power over the legislative one was, however, doubtful.

2. Organization

NETWORKS AND NETWORK ACTIVITIES

The initial 1939–April 1941 period of the League of the *Mnogodetni* was closely related to the numerous networking activities and publicity initiatives which its chairman Zhekov undertook to promote its goals. Ex-ministers, current Parliament members and prominent Bulgarian scholars such as Stoian Nikiforov (ex-minister, founder, and president of the Association of the Bulgarian Journalists and chairman of the Supreme Economic Chamber³⁹), Georgi Markov (centrist Agrarian, vice-chairman of the National Assembly⁴⁰) and Dr Petko Tsonev (lecturer in Education at Sofia University and ex-chief inspector of professional training at the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Labor, 1911–1913) were invited to join the League. On 1 March 1940, *Mnogodetnik* stated that the League's leader had contacted the child-rich, *mnogodetni* deputies of the National Assembly, too.⁴¹

³⁸ Lebedev, "The appeal of the *mnogodetni*, child-rich parents," *On the March*, No. 46–47 (24 May 1940), p. 3.

³⁹ Stoian Nikiforov (1888–1945): national deputy in the XXIst (1923–1927), XXIIInd (1927–1931) and XXVth (1940–1945) ONA; Minister of Industry and Labor (Jan. 1938–Nov. 1938). Tried by the People's Tribunal and executed (1 Feb. 1945). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, p. 324.

⁴⁰ In the early twenties, G. Markov had joined Kosta Tomov in opposing Stamboliiski's domestic policy, which they found too radical, and together they founded the right wing of the BANU. However, in 1927, Markov broke away from Tomov, assumed a more centrist position, and became the leader of one of the BANU factions, "Serdika." For further details, see Nissan Oren, *Bulgarian Communism: The Road to Power 1934–1944* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 18, 25.

The opening issues of the newspaper published articles by Prof. Iliia Ianulov and Dr Stefan Konsulov and a radio talk by Dr Dimo Burilkov (doctor, chairman of the League of Sanitary Workers, 1919–1939, secretary-in-chief of the Bulgarian branch of the Union against Tuberculosis, 1932–1938, and chairman of the Bulgarian Anti-Alcohol Federation, 1933–1941).⁴²

Zhekov ensured that the activities of the organization were well advertised on all social levels, and especially among the political elite. He managed to arrange personal appointments with ministers to promote the League's causes and visited the newly-appointed Minister of Justice, Vasil Mitakov,⁴³ to congratulate him upon the new position and to win his sympathies for the needs of large, *mnogodetni* families.⁴⁴ Zhekov recommended this persistence and face-to-face contact in their approach to important state officials to the members of the League, too, and equipped them with letters of recommendations for visits to municipal authorities and for applications for financial assistance from municipality budgets.⁴⁵ The League's congresses held in May 1939 and 1940 were expected to follow a similar approach: letters of gratitude were sent to the king and to Minister of the Interior and People's Health, Nedev, to Prime Minister Georgi Kioseivanov, and to the chairman of the National Assembly, Logofetov.⁴⁶ *Mnogodetnik* put painstaking efforts into informing its readers of the numerous congratulations received from prominent public figures, such as the Minister of War, Daskalov, the National Assembly chairman, Logofetov, and Prof. Dr Stoian Vatev, chairman of the Bulgarian Child Protection Union and ex-director of the Directorate of People's Health, 1908–1912.⁴⁷ In order to promote broadly the 1940 Congress in Veliko Tŭrnovo, referred to as "the historic congress," Zhekov was reported to have arrived there three days in advance.⁴⁸ He was said to have visited the local authorities represented by the head of the army garrison, the city mayor and Bishop Sofronii,

⁴¹ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 8 (15 May 1940), p. 1.

⁴² *Encyclopedia Bulgaria*, I, (1978), p. 418.

⁴³ Vasil Mitakov (1891–1945): chair of the Codification Commission at the Ministry of Justice (1931–1935), Minister of Justice (Oct. 1939–April 1942); tried by the People's Tribunal and executed (1 Feb. 1945). For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 290–291.

⁴⁴ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 5 (30 January 1940), p. 1.

⁴⁵ See circular letter No. 4 from 25 January 1940, *Mnogodetnik*, No. 5 (30 January 1940), p. 1.

⁴⁶ "The historic congress in Veliko Tŭrnovo," *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 1.

⁴⁷ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 8 (15 May 1940), p. 2.

and to have handed them personal invitations to attend. In return, the League's sympathizers were allowed to decorate Veliko Tŭrnovo with flowers and national banners, a grand arch was erected in the center to welcome the child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents, and thousands of leaflets and fliers were distributed inviting the citizens of Tŭrnovo to come and listen to Zhekov's speech on the ideology of the League.

However, a closer examination of Zhekov's set of political contacts reveals that the majority of public and state officials in his network belonged to the era of ex-Prime Minister Kioseivanov, a figure once used by the king to reinforce his personal rule, but whose political capital was now on the wane.⁴⁸ They also seem to have shared little sympathy for Filov's strongly pro-German outlooks: Teodosii Daskalov, Minister of War in Kioseivanov's fourth cabinet and Minister of War in Filov's first government, was later dismissed by Filov for opposing Bulgaria's alliance with the Tripartite Pact and expressing doubts on Germany's war progress. Similarly, G. Markov and P. Tsonev were discharged from the central executive committee of the *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich League following Gabrovski's order of 23 August 1941—despite their high political and academic positions.

CONGRESSES AND SYMBOLISM

Resolute in his fight to put the League's aims into practice, Zhekov tapped into the spirit of Bulgaria's political life in his speeches. The 1939 and 1940 congresses were rife with symbolic references to the glorious past of Bulgaria as a link to an awaited future pregnant with hopes for territorial reunion with the lands lost in the 1912–1919 wars. Both congresses were held in the city of Veliko Tŭrnovo—the medieval capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1185–1393) renowned for its vast geographic extent, its

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁹ Georgi Kioseivanov (1884–1960): Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cults (1935–February 1940), Prime Minister (1936–November 1938). As prime minister, Kioseivanov normalized Bulgaria's relations with the Balkan countries, enhanced her relations with the Soviet Union and oriented Bulgaria toward Germany. In communist historiography Prime Minister Georgi Kioseivanov's role in Bulgarian politics was denigrated to the function of a mere "courtier" under King Boris's personal rule. This statement has been refuted by post-1989 Bulgarian historians, from whose studies Kioseivanov emerges as a gifted diplomat, with a strong presence of his own in Bulgaria's foreign policy. For further details, see Ivan Bozhilov, Vera Mutafchieva, Andrei Pantev, Konstantin Kosev, Stoicho Grüncharov, *Istoriia na Bŭlgariia* [A history of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Abagar, 1998), p. 464; Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 257–258.

borders extending to the Aegean, the Adriatic, the Black Sea, and the rivers Morava and Danube, and incorporating most of Macedonia:

There is no greater symbol than this name [Veliko Tŭrnovo—S.B.] for Bulgaria of the child-rich. It is the place where today the spark of true Bulgarian-ness has been rekindled thanks to the wise decisions of united *mnogodetni* Bulgaria, just as it was centuries ago, when in the folds of Trapezitsa the great Bulgarian kingdom blossomed and inspired respect among its close and distant neighbors.⁵⁰

Similarly, the opening meeting of the 1939 Congress was held in the *chitalishte* [popular culture club] Nadezhda, uniting the launching of the Congress with the resonant name of the club, meaning “Hope.”⁵¹ This was the place which had hosted the Constituent Assembly of the newly liberated Bulgarian state in February 1879 when it had witnessed a one-week protest on the part of its deputies concerning the territorial issues of the divided nation. It was not by chance that the *mnogodetni* delegates passionately applauded “the glorious Bulgarian army which had inscribed the most radiant pages in the Bulgarian history”; and that a procession was organized in the central streets led by enthusiastic women, and ending at the Liberation Monument.⁵²

MANAGEMENT AND MEMBERSHIP

Above all, however, Zhekov’s instructions to the League’s branches precisely obeyed the requirements of the restrictive national legislation on public meetings and associations. Each branch, with no exception, was compelled to submit a copy of its constitution to the executive committee for inspection, as according to the law this had to be approved by the Ministry of the Interior and People’s Health. The branches were proposed to study and adopt as a model the League’s major constitution, published

⁵⁰ “Velichestveniiat süiuzen kongres v Tŭrnovo, dni na vŭzhod, vŭodushevenie i stroitelstvo” [The majestic congress in Tŭrnovo—days of ascendance, inspiration, and construction], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 8 (15 May 1940), p. 1.

⁵¹ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 8 (15 May 1940), p. 2.

⁵² *Mnogodetnik*, No. 3 (14 November 1939), p. 1.

in No. 2 of *Mnogodetnik* 1939. Recommendations were sent out to follow the League's announcements in *Mnogodetnik*, which summarized the legal details of its activities. Indeed, if one compares the various letters posted by rural members relating to their formal demands, their similarity in content and style is striking. The differences were mostly confined to the size of requested family benefits. Members were kept under strict discipline by the central executive committee and frequent revisions were carried out in the branches in order to keep a track of their financial affairs.

A distinctive feature of the League's membership policy was its gender attitude—women were not simply invited but also strongly encouraged to enter the local branches and participate actively in the life of the League. But in practice, while women were reported to predominate in the urban branches—in the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Ruse, and Shumen three quarters of the members were said to be mothers⁵³—the countryside seems to have lagged behind. The executive board did their best to appeal to their interests and to mobilize female supporter on behalf of the League's objectives as well as its discipline. Circular letter No. 5 was sent out to rural members in early February 1940 regarding financial control.⁵⁴ It was a reminder concerning the importance of regular fee contributions—and women were seen as the proper instrument for seeing that the League's rules were strictly adhered to. According to Zhekov, no special meetings were needed to collect the monthly payments; this could be done in the *makhli* [small residence quarters] by the wives of the members themselves. By using their natural eloquence and networking abilities, Zhekov believed that women were able to put pressure upon their husbands and stimulate them to pay their monthly fees. Women were to be incorporated actively into the League's activities, as the benefits which the League was fighting for were a gain not merely for the man but for the entire family: "Many have not understood that the entire family joins the League—the reforms and relief are provided alike to the father, to the mother and to the children, i.e., to the whole family. The mother has as much at stake in her membership as has the father."⁵⁵

⁵³ Ginka Kazanova, "Maiki, zaemete mestata si!" [Mothers, take your places!], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 15 (1 June 1941), p. 4.

⁵⁴ Circular No. 5 from 12 February 1940, *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 2.

⁵⁵ Kazanova, "Mothers, take your places!" p. 4.

This emphasis on the role of women has to be contextualized within the changing political atmosphere during the so-called “personal rule of King Boris” and especially within the new war-oriented reality in the country. According to the suffrage law for municipal (local) elections of 18 January 1937, women, defined as married mothers and widows, were granted the right to vote, and nine months later, in October 1937, anticipating the new parliamentary elections, suffrage was extended to all married women.⁵⁶ Moreover, on 4 May 1940 the Civilian Mobilization Law was passed, the scope of which became all Bulgarian citizens in the age range of 16 to 70, regardless their gender.⁵⁷

In face of the prospect of having their active male membership reduced because of war mobilization, especially after Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact on 1 March 1941, the League increasingly felt the need to rely on female support. The editorial of *Mnogodetnik* from 6 March 1941 appealed to women to join the League as “now, when the father has been summoned to perform his duty to his homeland, it is his wife who legally should replace him and be a member of the League.”⁵⁸ Zhekov addressed the female sympathizers of the League in his circular letter No. 21 from March 1941: “The men are away from their homes these days—let the mothers keep up a correspondence with the League or [if illiterate] ask teachers and their better-read children to help them do so.”⁵⁹ The League asserted that it would defend their maternal interests and this declaration was repeated in circular letter No. 21, which urged its members to pay visits to the families of mobilized men and offer them a helping hand in their everyday chores.⁶⁰

The above-mentioned circular, however, did not refer to women in general but to the *Bulgarian* child-rich, *mnogodetni* mothers and thus adopted an exclusionary approach towards membership of families of a non-Bulgarian ethnic background. The descriptive notes in the League’s files in the National Archives specify that some Gypsies had made attempts to join the

⁵⁶ Ivan Bozhilov et al., (eds.), *A History of Bulgaria*, pp. 461–462.

⁵⁷ Article 15, in “Zakon za Grazhdanska Mobilizatsiia” [Civilian Mobilization Law], *Dürzhaven Vestnik* [State Gazette], No. 100 (4 May 1940), pp. 1–4

⁵⁸ Circular letter No. 21, *Mnogodetnik*, No. 11 (6 March 1941), p. 2.

⁵⁹ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 11 (6 March 1941), p. 1.

⁶⁰ Circular letter No. 21, *Mnogodetnik*, No. 11 (6 March 1941), p. 2.

League yet were denied membership.⁶¹ Although no corresponding document could be found in the archival folder, comments of contributors to *Mnogodetnik* and of the League's leader himself suggest that ethnicity might have played a role in the League's ideological thinking, at least for some of its members. Thus Geo Komitski, member of the Bezhanolo branch, explicitly demanded that membership be restricted to ethnic Bulgarians alone—as “the problem of boosting the birth rates is a purely national issue.”⁶² Other correspondents of *Mnogodetnik* related their racial preferences to the demography of the country but also to its “unfortunate” history. Yet, such manifestations of racial intolerance should not be overestimated, and racial issues never became part of the League's formally expressed concerns.

ROLE MODELS

The editorials and the correspondents of *Mnogodetnik* frequently resorted to a comparative approach in promoting and defending their objectives, and once again, the peculiarities of the country's foreign orientations were fully taken into consideration. Italy, France, occasionally Belgium, England, Yugoslavia, Denmark, but above all Germany were pointed out as models for the provision of welfare to large, *mnogodetni* families, which the Bulgarian state was recommended to reflect on or, in regard to Germany, to follow. As early as November 1939, *Mnogodetnik* started publishing accounts of the welfare legislation of the most prominent European countries, which directly reviewed the plight of families with numerous children. It was reported that France [pre-Vichy] had introduced a new pronatalist law, which incorporated the needs of large families and provided appropriate housing for them. In addition, the subsidies had been extended from homeless *mnogodetni* parents to large families with homes of their own, large families being defined as those with three or more children.⁶³ A few months later, on 1 March 1940, the journalist Bogdan Vasilev reported the

⁶¹ Gypsies were by no means uniform in their religious affiliation but showed strong religious syncretism. Their attitude towards religion changed easily and swiftly according to their needs and the institutions capable to offer solutions to this problem. For further details, see Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov, *Tsiganite v Bŭlgariia* [Gypsies in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Klub '90, 1993), pp. 122–124. Italics by me—S.B.

⁶² *Mnogodetnik*, No. 15 (1 June 1941), p. 2.

⁶³ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 3 (14 November 1939), p. 3.

intentions of the French premier, Edouard Daladier, to introduce a twenty per cent tax on the income of childless families, widows, divorcees, and single persons in support of large French families.⁶⁴ Earlier, a radio speech by Dr D. Burilkov had been published, with a short survey of the evolution of French family law regarding large families.⁶⁵ It was pointed out that ever since 1913, France had initiated protective legal measures for large families by obliging the *départements* to provide means-tested allowances for families with three and more children under the age of thirteen, or for those with two children if raised in a female-headed household.⁶⁶ It was stated that the French *Alliance Nationale pour l'Accroissement de la Population Française*⁶⁷ was considering the introduction of nuptial loans for newly-wed young couples, as well as maternity benefits and special rewards for large families.⁶⁸ Justifying the need for the establishment in Bulgaria of a League

⁶⁴ Bogdan Vasilev, "Tegloto na mnogodetnata maika na selo" [The plight of the *mnogodetni* mother in the countryside], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 2. In fact, Vasilev was referring to Prime Minister Daladier and Minister of Finance Reynaud's attempt to bring all previous pronatalist measures under one law, namely the *Code de la famille* [Family Code], promulgated by decree of 29 July 1939. The latter also envisaged a punitive tax for bachelors and childless couples to raise the necessary revenue for the other measures. The outbreak of the Second World War prevented the full application of the French Family Code in practice—that was done later by the Vichy regime. For further details, see Richard Tomlinson, "The 'disappearance' of France, 1896–1940: French politics and the birth rate," *The Historical Journal*, No. 2 (1985), 405–415, pp. 413–414; D.V. Glass, *Population Politics and Movements in Europe* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1967), pp. 215–216.

⁶⁵ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 3 (14 November 1939), pp. 1–2.

⁶⁶ Two laws had been passed in France in July 1913, the one offering modest financial help to large families with at least three children, the other providing maternity aid to pregnant women in the form of a financial subsidy and a reduction in medical fees. They became "the turning point for the pronatalist cause," as they were France's legislative response to the increasing size of Germany's peacetime army between 1911 and 1913 at a time when the French annual recruitment was declining due to decreasing birth rates. For further details, see Tomlinson, "The 'disappearance' of France, 1896–1940," pp. 407–408.

⁶⁷ *The Alliance Nationale pour l'Accroissement de la Population Française* was founded in 1896 by the government statistician Jacques Bertillon. Its members included high state officials, prominent businessmen, and public figures. The founders attacked the "individualistic" doctrines of economic liberalism in the country, which, according to them, disproportionately rewarded the childless. They believed that a reform of the liberal institutions—the tax system, the civil service, the military, and perhaps the wage system itself—would favor the prolific *père de famille* [family father]. Hence the Alliance Nationale advocated tax relief for child-rich fathers, a cut in the period of their military service, privileged government positions for members of large families, a change of the inheritance laws which would allow a father to divide his property unequally among his children—since, it was argued, the Napoleonic Code's insistence on equal inheritance induced peasants to limit their families. Finally, the Alliance insisted on a state-instituted system of family allowances for large families. For further details, see Paul Dutton, *Origins of the French Welfare State: The Struggle for Social Reform in France, 1914–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 22–23; Susan Pederson, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 60–65; Tomlinson, "The 'disappearance' of France," pp. 405–412; D.V. Glass, "Family planning programmes and actions in Western Europe," *Population Studies*, No. 3 (1966), pp. 221–238, 223–224.

⁶⁸ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 3 (14 November 1939), pp. 1–2.

of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents, Zhekov, too, indicated in 1940 that some fifty countries had already founded organizations with similar objectives: France, Belgium, and Germany had done so, respectively twenty-eight, eighteen and ten years earlier. He praised the sensible, in his words, cash-aid granted to the child-rich, *mnogodetni* workers in France and Belgium in accordance with the number of children they had: "Thus no two workers receive identical salaries, but the latter depends on the number of their children—a bachelor will be entitled to the smallest salary, and a child-rich, *mnogodetni* father to the highest pay."⁶⁹

Italy, too, was admired for her state care of large families. Zhekov pointed out that since 1923, i.e., immediately after Mussolini's ascent to political power, more than twenty-one laws had been passed to support large families. A state fund had been created for this purpose and special anniversary stamps had been issued, the proceeds of the sale being donated to the fund.⁷⁰ Large families enjoyed numerous privileges: according to the number of children, up to fifty per cent or more tax relief was granted to fathers of numerous children as well as a similar fifty per cent fare reduction in rail, sea, or air travel. Children coming from large families were exempt from school taxes, were entitled to free schoolbooks and school trips, and on leaving school were entitled to preference for local municipal positions. The words of Italian President Rampone were cited that it was the state's duty to guarantee assistance for its large families in return for their self-sacrifice for the nation. Most of all, it was emphasized that the peasants' life had improved dramatically in Mussolini's Italy⁷¹—words which were calculated to appeal to the Bulgarian readers, as over seventy-six per cent of the country's population lived in the rural countryside.

Short notices were published about state assistance to large families in neighboring Yugoslavia and far-away Denmark: Dr Šutej, Yugoslavia's minister of finance, had promised a wage increase for government employees with children—50 dinars were to be added to their monthly salaries per child.⁷² Copenhagen's municipal authorities, too, had taken the support of large families to heart—families with five and more children were to be

⁶⁹ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 4 (1 January 1940), p. 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 13 (20 April 1941), p. 3.

⁷² *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 4.

granted rent reduction, and a new suburb designed especially for their wants was to be constructed on the city's outskirts by the end of 1941.⁷³

The encroaching threat of war became a platform for further insistent debates on the necessity of state support for Bulgarian families. *Mnogodetnik* published a comparative table of the allowances which soldiers' families received in Germany, England, and France in order to convince its readership—but also the chairman of the National Assembly—to speed up the placing of a Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families onto the discussion agenda of the Assembly. The chairman of the Assembly was encouraged to lobby for a prompt passage of the law—just as had been done in “the fighting countries,” which had already taken proper care of their warriors.⁷⁴ It was argued that these days, state assistance for soldiers' families came second in importance, immediately after the establishment and assurance of military order:

This is the basis for a social and humane policy. Timely measures in this field were taken in Germany a long while ago; the unsatisfactory welfare measures in England caused great discontent in the English Parliament, whereas in France decent care is provided for the warriors' families as far as their children are concerned. However, if compared to her English sister, the French wife receives far less cash support.⁷⁵

The League advertised itself as a pro-natalist association and advocated strong state intervention on behalf of large families. In its first issue, *Mnogodetnik* proudly cited Dr Dimo Burilkov's radio speech, which had advertised the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents as the first one in Bulgaria to raise the issue of the plight of large families in the context of falling birth rates.⁷⁶ The First Congress of the League, held on 24 May 1939 and attended by over 700 child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents, emphasized in its final resolution “the threat of decreasing birth rates”—a process which had been continuing for nearly a quarter of a century in Bulgaria.⁷⁷ The state of the

⁷³ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 15 (1 June 1941), p. 2.

⁷⁴ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 9 (15 September 1940), p. 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 3 (14 November 1939), pp. 1–2.

⁷⁷ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 1 (22 June 1939), p. 3.

country's population was defined as "unnatural—both for the individual and for the society" as it was leading to "degeneration" and was "sapping the life power of the *Volk* and threatening the very existence of the state." In vice-chairman Nikiforov's eyes, humanity was going through a terrible era of selfishness, egotism, avarice and absence of compassion in international relations. This could be successfully combated only by "children and just children." Children alone could save humanity from the lurking dread of future days—a warlike horror which otherwise would obliterate the grand achievements of past and present civilizations, just as once-flourishing ancient Greece and Rome had been buried under destruction.⁷⁸

With a view to fostering a more family-friendly state policy to remedy the decline in fertility in Bulgaria, the League actively tried to intervene in the legislative policies of the state with both action and advice. Recommendations were given to implement legal penalties for induced abortion and the persecution of abortionists, as was being done in Germany.⁷⁹ Provisions regarding illegitimate children which would grant women the right to bring paternity suits on the basis of a blood test should be introduced. *Mnogodetnik* informed its audience that such legal provisions had already been passed in Germany, codified in article 9 of the German Family Law (*Familienrechts-gesetz*) of 12 April 1938 and had also been suggested in England by the royal doctor, Lord Dawson. A law which would lift the ban on the search for the putative father and provide children outside marriage with an equal opportunity to paternal inheritance as their legitimate counterparts was seen as an effective instrument to transfer the responsibility for children outside marriage onto their biological fathers, rather than leave them to the care of the society or the state. Divorce, too, had to undergo reforms—especially when a marriage proved to be barren of children after its fifth year:

The state and the *Volk* have no interest in supporting such marriages. Divorce should be granted on demand and the sooner the better, and without special formalities and proof. The state most values marriages with more than three children and this is why it is imperative to grant them corresponding rights just as is done in Germany.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 1 (22 June 1939), p. 1.

⁷⁹ "Khronika" [Chronicle], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 1 (22 June 1939), p. 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Similarly, some League's members insisted that bachelors' taxes be raised to at least 100 leva for single men and cautiously hinted that the opportunity existed to have a corresponding tax enacted on small families with one or two children.⁸¹ Voices were raised in favor of nuptial loans for young couples but also for state intervention in the private life of bachelors so that the latter would be forced eventually into matrimony.⁸²

3. Combating poverty

However, pronatalist outcries, though they reflected some of the League's concerns, did not constitute its main activities. Despite its rhetoric, which closely echoed the concerns of the day, the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-rich Parents was in practice far more ready to function as a welfare association, whose primary goal was to alleviate the economic situation of Bulgaria's child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents. With respect to this, Prof. Iliia Ianulov's view on the necessity of social support and social solidarity was cited. The current difficult economic, educational, and social conditions had made it impossible to regard the family as a self-sufficient unit separate from society itself because "the great population density, the mounting necessities and demands for a higher lifestyle, the rising misery, and poverty in today's period of crisis" had brought the family to a crisis.⁸³ The more children in a family, the less financial support was available per capita so that the income which would be adequate to allow a three-member family to meet its needs would reduce an eight-member family to complete misery. While a market approach to the setting of wage levels could not be avoided, it needed to be supplemented by a system of national income distribution, which would grant benefits and allowances to large, *mnogodetni* families. This was a new policy, which, however, would guarantee the reproduction of the nation in the conditions of a general economic and social crisis. It was the state's responsibility to break with liberal market principles and to adopt a social role which would turn it into the arbiter among the classes in the name of

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 3, 4; Ivan Apostolov, "Narodonarastvashkata politika v Bŭlgariia i polozhenieto na mnogodetnite" [Pronatalist policy in Bulgaria and the plight of the *mnogodetni* parents], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), pp. 2–3.

⁸² Apostolov, "Pronatalist policy in Bulgaria," No. 7 (1 March 1940), pp. 2–3.

⁸³ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 1.

their common social interest. It was only via the imposition of social justice that the state could secure the protection of society and of itself.⁸⁴

A number of *Mnogodetnik*'s readers thought along the same lines and believed that if the state insisted on having large families, then it had to grant privileges to its child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents. "Now, because of the hard conditions and our bitter experience, the *mnogodetni* themselves have become victims of their love for children," Mrs Iurdanka Angelova, member of the Khaskovo branch, complained.⁸⁵

As the father takes care of his children, so our statesmen and municipal officials, too, should provide for the large, *mnogodetni* families. Otherwise, death is confronting them. It is in the name of our mother-country that the latter should not be left starving, naked and without a spark of warmth in life.⁸⁶

Taxation of singles and of small or childless families was suggested as another means to divert funds to the larger (and hence, poorer) families,⁸⁷ though it, too, came under attack for similar concerns regarding poverty. A number of bachelors, it was claimed, had been forced to avoid matrimony for the sake of their brothers, sisters, and parents, as the latter's support entirely depended on them. It was unfair to enforce a bachelors' tax on them in these circumstances.⁸⁸ In 1941, the established 100 lev child allowance granted by the state to its employees was seen as quite insufficient under the conditions of a 50–60 per cent galloping inflation, and it was recommended to have it raised to the level of 500 levs.⁸⁹

CHILD ALLOWANCES, TAX-REVISIONS, AND RAILWAY FARE DISCOUNTS

The League's propaganda and activities in this field reaped their fruit some four months later, although it came in the form of a compromise. On 4 September 1941, the newly appointed leader of the League and Member

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Iurdanka Angelova, "Mnogodetniia problem" [The *mnogodetni*'s problem], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 11 (6 March 1941), p. 4.

⁸⁶ Angel Tsvetkov, head of the League's branch in the village of Ravnogor, "Grizhi za mnogodetnite semeistva" [Care for the large, *mnogodetni* families], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 11 (6 March 1941), p. 4.

⁸⁷ Apostolov, "Pronatalist policy in Bulgaria," No. 7 (1 March 1940), pp. 2–3.

⁸⁸ Angelova, "The *mnogodetni*'s problem," No. 11 (6 March 1941), p. 4.

⁸⁹ N. Stanchov, "Mnogodetna gatanka" [A *mnogodetni* riddle], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 17 (26 June 1941), p. 2.

of Parliament, Dimitŭr Saradzhov,⁹⁰ is recorded to have presented to the attention of the state budget commission of the XXVth National Assembly the Bill for Temporary Wage Increase and Temporary Supplementary Family Subsidies of State Officials in the Kingdom. Saradzhov had suggested directing a proposed increase in bachelors' taxes to the needs of child-rich, *mnogodetni* state employees, according to which the latter's allowances were to be raised by some 200 levs per child—in addition to the 100 levs which they had been entitled to according to article 4 of the Law for the 1941 State Budget.⁹¹ In his view, all state employees with three or more children should enjoy a cash benefit of 300 levs per child. Taking into account the existing state funds and their wish to retain the goodwill of its state employees, the state budget commission had opted for a revised settlement. Employees with two children were entitled to an additional sum of 100 levs for a second child on top of the 100 levs cash benefit which was granted to them by the 1941 state budget; whereas employees with three and more children were given an additional 100 levs for the second child and 200 levs for the third, fourth and subsequent children.⁹² The new regulations were enacted *post factum*, i.e., starting from 1 September 1941.⁹³

The League's major activities under the leadership of Z. Zhekov should be seen in the context of its attempts to obtain targeted economic relief for large, *mnogodetni* families. Unlike Germany, where the goal of the *Bund der Kinderreichen* was to ensure at least five–six children per racially qualifying family,⁹⁴ the Bulgarian League of the *Mnogodetni* narrowed the minimum qualification of children per family to three, and its objectives are best summarized in the statement of Ivan Apostolov (a member and correspondent from the village of Debeltsov, Sevlievo district): "In order to increase fertil-

⁹⁰ Dimitŭr Saradzhov (1897–unknown). Lawyer and public figure, Mayor of the city of Vratsa (1933); member of Parliament (1938–1944), and member of numerous parliamentary commissions, including the Commission of Interior Affairs and the Commission for Justice. For further details, see Vŭlo Ivanov, "Zasluzhil grazhdanin na Vratsa" [A honorable citizen of Vratsa], *Zov za Istina* [An appeal for truth], No. 29 (20–26 November 2006), p. 3.

⁹¹ See "Bill for Amending and Supplementing the Decree for Income Taxation" of 17 December 1940 in Chapter 3 above.

⁹² *Native Awakening*, No. 19 (4 September 1941), p. 3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ For further details on the German League of Large Families (*Reichsbund der Kinderreichen*) see chapter 3: "The *Kinderreich* family," in Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy, 1933–1945* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), pp. 88–125; Jill Stephenson, "Reichsbund der Kinderreichen: The League of Large Families in the population policy of Nazi Germany," *European Studies Review*, No. 3 (1979), pp. 351–375.

ity, we should give a hand to the *mnogodetni*, i.e., to families with three and more children, in the first place, so that the latter can raise their children and ensure them a better future as good and useful citizens of the state.”⁹⁵ Similar were *Mnogodetnik*’s arguments explaining the new Taxation Law passed by the Minister of Finance, Dobri Bozhilov, on 17 December 1940.⁹⁶ The latter had enforced a significant tax increase for bachelors and childless widowers (twelve per cent), for childless married tax-payers (nine per cent), for parents with one child (six per cent), and for parents with two children (three per cent). In contrast, parents with four, five, six, and seven up to nine children had been granted a tax reduction of two per cent, five per cent, seven per cent, and fifteen per cent, respectively. Tax-payers with ten and more children had been granted exemption from taxation if their annual income was under 500 thousand leva. However, “no income tax relief is provided for parents of three children,” complained *Mnogodetnik*.⁹⁷ Consequently, the League’s executive board referred to the new legislative initiative as “somewhat unsatisfactory,” though Minister’s Bozhilov’s initiative was given recognition as “a good start.”⁹⁸

The League focused on the stressful material conditions of large families and appeals were made to the state to support them with a pension or with cash benefits⁹⁹—issues of high significance in Bulgarian society, since until the end of 1940 agricultural workers and craftsmen were not included in any pension scheme. On 1 March 1940, Zhekov published an open circular letter to all mayors in the country reminding them of the decisions of the League’s 1939 Congress and insisting on “a humble sum in support of the idea of encouraging natality and assisting the children of child-rich parents.” This could be easily done from the municipalities’ special hardship funds, he argued, and the *mnogodetni* families should be considered eligible to apply to them.¹⁰⁰ These claims were repeated in circular letter No. 16 of 20 December 1940, and some new demands were added: discount was

⁹⁵ Apostolov, “Pronatalist policy in Bulgaria,” No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 2.

⁹⁶ Apostolov referred to the “Amendment and Supplement of the Decree for Income Taxation” of December 1940, which included tax rebates based on marital status and parenthood, as well as tax increases for singles, divorcees, and the childless widowed. See Chapter 3 above.

⁹⁷ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 10 (1 January 1941), p. 2.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ M. Petrov, “Da podkrepim brakovete” [Let’s support marriages], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 2 (15 July 1939), p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 1.

to be provided for the large families' access to public spas, and low-level municipal positions were to be offered to members of large families. Such measures were qualified by Zhekov as "an issue of humanity and compassion" and in the long run, as support for the future citizens of the Bulgarian state.¹⁰¹

There were also demands to reduce or repeal school fees for children of large families, as well as assist them with the purchase of schoolbooks, uniforms, and school meals. It was noted that according to the existing Law for People's Education published in the *State Gazette* No. 176 of 12 August, 1938, school fees for only children amounted to 1,700 levs per annum, while second and third children enjoyed a reduction of 600 levs and of 1,100 levs respectively.¹⁰² This, however, was regarded as insufficient and "unfair" as it referred only to families with a monthly income below 1,800 levs.¹⁰³ If their income exceeded the sum total of 1,800 levs, large families were required to pay the full school fee for all their children—despite the fact that most of their earnings would be spent on their children's education. The League objected to the existing means-tested school fee system and called for further financial relief for children of child-rich parents regardless of their income. In June 1941, *Mnogodetnik* assured its readers that the League would invest its efforts into having the law amended by July 1941, so that the children of large families would be exempt from paying fees.¹⁰⁴

A picture of Zakhari Zhekov heading the delegation of the League's Sofia branch to a meeting with Prime Minister and Minister of Education Bogdan Filov was published in the No. 18 issue of *Mnogodetnik* soon afterwards. It was proof that the League's executive board was working to fulfill its promise. Indeed, on 14 September 1941, a few weeks after the state's takeover of the League, the renamed *National Awakening* newspaper informed its readers that the newly appointed temporary executive board of the League had received Bogdan Filov's personal approval of the proposed School Fee Bill and the latter had been forwarded to the Council of Ministers for approval. However, the temporary executive board chaired

¹⁰¹ Circular letter No. 16 from 20 December 1940, *Mnogodetnik*, No. 10 (1 January 1941), p. 1.

¹⁰² T. Kamenov, "Da se namaliat i premakhnat uchilishtnite taski za mnogodetnite" [Let's have the school taxes for the large, *mnogodetni* families reduced or repealed], *Mnogodetnik*, No. 3 (14 November 1939), p. 2.

¹⁰³ Angelova, "The *mnogodetni*'s problem," *Mnogodetnik*, No. 11 (6 March 1941), p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 17 (26 June 1941), p. 4.

by Saradzhov had accepted a compromise—instead of insisting on a total remittance of school fees for its members, it had agreed upon a fee reduction. Exemption from school fees was to be granted to children whose parents were defined as “poor,” as well as to children of disabled war-veterans. Children of well-off, *mnogodetni* parents paid their school fees according to a sliding scheme: no fee remittance was granted to the first child, the second one was charged fifty per cent of the total fees, and all other children enjoyed complete exemption. The new school fee regulations were to be incorporated and voted in the National Assembly as part of the Law for People’s Education and of a Law for Encouraging Births, which was stated to be still under preparation in the Ministry of the Interior and People’s Health.¹⁰⁵

An important achievement which the League under Zhekov’s leadership claimed as its own was the right of child-rich parents to railway fare discounts.¹⁰⁶ The issue was first raised during Zhekov’s meeting with Vasil Mitakov, the minister of justice, in 1939,¹⁰⁷ and a year later the League could proudly assert that some reforms had already been implemented. Children of *mnogodetni* parents (with three or more children) were granted a fifty per cent railway fare discount if traveling together or a thirty per cent discount if two children were traveling.¹⁰⁸ Letter No. III-211—1250/2, signed by D. Milenov, head of the General Directorate of Bulgarian Railways and ports, was published in *Mnogodetnik* to inform its readers of the decision of the Council of the General Directorate of 2 October 1940 and enacted from 1 December 1940. Large, *mnogodetni* families with three and more children less than twenty-one years of age, as well as an accompanying relative or family friend, were granted the privilege to travel to sanatoriums or for any other medical purpose at a fifty per cent railway return discount. Six months later, due to Zhekov’s alleged insistence, child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents, too, were given the privilege to take advantage of a fifty per cent

¹⁰⁵ “Sŭiuznata uprava pri Bogdan Filov” [The League’s board visited Bogdan Filov], *Native Awakening*, No. 19 (14 September 1941), p. 2; Circular letter No. 3 from 9 September 1941, sent to the heads of the League’s local branches, *Ibid*; “Khronika” (Chronicle), *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Ever since December 1884, Bulgarian railways have been state-owned. For further details, see Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁷ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 3 (14 November 1939), p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Circular letter No. 15 from 14 December 1940, *Mnogodetnik*, No. 10 (1 January 1941), p. 3.

railway fare discount once a year. This, however, held true only for parents of five or more children—a fact which left the League dissatisfied, and further pressure was exerted on Ivan Goranov, Minister of Railways,¹⁰⁹ to have this injustice removed. “The minister promised to have it abolished,” *Mnogodetnik* affirmed to its audience,¹¹⁰ and indeed, on 15 May 1941, the right of a sick, large-family member to one return railway ticket per annum was extended to parents of three children.¹¹¹ Significantly, such a railway discount was bestowed on members of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents only, and a document issued either by the League’s local branch or by the municipality was required as a proof of eligibility.¹¹² From 14 June 1941 onward, membership in the League, certified by the member’s booklet, was sufficient to allow it to claim these benefits.¹¹³

APPEALS FOR LAND REDISTRIBUTION AND JUSTICE

Despite the League’s significant campaigns in the field of social benefits on behalf of large, *mnogodetni* families, the League’s main efforts were directed to land reform—an issue of rising state importance in the 1930s and early 1940s. In his New Year address to *Mnogodetnik* on 1 January 1940, the League’s chairman Zhekov, appealing to legislators to adopt as role model other European countries, summarized European welfare legislation under three categories. While France and Belgium predominantly provided cash benefits for large families, other countries combined cash allowances with financial incentives. Still others had introduced symbolic measures (medals) and had legislated economic encouragement.¹¹⁴ As nearly eighty per

¹⁰⁹ Ivan Goranov (1891–1945): Minister of Railways (Feb. 1940–April 1942), director of the Cabinet of Regents (1943–1944). Goranov opposed Bulgaria’s involvement against the Allies in World War II. Tried by the People’s Tribunal and executed on 1 Feb. 1945. For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, p. 123.

¹¹⁰ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 13 (20 April 1941), p. 2.

¹¹¹ See circular letter No. 24 from 20 May 1941 by Zakhari Zhekov as well as letter No. 12887 of 15 May 1941 to the editors of all countryside newspapers, *Mnogodetnik*, No. 14 (22 May 1941), pp. 2, 3; Letter No. 16697 from 3 June 1941 of the General Directorate of People’s Health at the Ministry of the Interior and People’s Health, carbon copy to the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents, *Mnogodetnik*, No. 15 (1 June 1941), p. 3.

¹¹² *Mnogodetnik*, No. 10 (1 January 1941), p. 3.

¹¹³ Letter No. III-211-130 by the director of the General Directorate of Bulgarian Railways and Ports of 14 June 1941, carbon copy to the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents, *Mnogodetnik*, No. 17 (26 June 1941), p. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 5 (30 January 1940), p. 2. The names of the countries in the last two categories were not specified.

cent of Bulgaria's population was officially acknowledged to be agricultural, the League's concerns were distinctly oriented to the countryside and its primary target group became the ultimate producers, i.e. "peasants and craftsmen." The latter were said to

produce intensely but their production is bought out cheaply by foreigners, bachelors or childless, who would later pass it through several hands and finally offer it back to the child-rich, however, at a much higher price. In this way child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents are both the producers and the consumers, while the childless collect all the big gains at the *mnogodetni*'s expense.¹¹⁵

Not only were the child-rich peasants exploited; according to correspondent Ivan Apostolov, they had also been forced into misery and starvation. The child-rich parents in Bulgaria were predominantly poor peasants with insufficient land. Only if the "catastrophic decline in fertility" was seen against the background of the devaluation of the peasants' labor and efforts, could an explanation of the falling birth rates be found.¹¹⁶ To illustrate the disastrous land hunger, Apostolov cited official statistics. The rural population lived in circa 800,000 agricultural households, forty-two per cent of which possessed no more than 3 hectares all in all. However, "three or four hectares of land are nowhere near enough to sustain a farmer's family with three or four children," Apostolov noted. Forty per cent of all agricultural households had been pushed into renting land. As these were mostly households with three and more children, they had been "left to the mercy of destiny," and had been reduced to a "laughing stock—an object of ridicule," by the rest of the community.¹¹⁷

Indeed, throughout the late 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s, Bulgarian and international economic and demographic studies had been warning of the increasing menace of land hunger in Bulgaria's rural areas. Landholdings under ten hectares were the norm (85 per cent in 1926, increasing to 93.1 per cent of the total in 1946), while large estates over thirty hectares were the exception (0.6 per cent in 1926, and circa 0.4 per cent in 1934).

¹¹⁵ "The historic congress in Veliko Tŭrnovo," No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 1.

¹¹⁶ Apostolov, "Pronatalist policy in Bulgaria," No. 7 (1 March 1940), pp. 2–3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Agriculture remained mainly self-sufficient, backward (fertilizers and machinery were only sparsely used) as well as labor-intensive (the production of 0.4 hectares of maize required 305 man hours in Bulgaria as against 35 hours in the USA). However, crop diversification was encouraged by the state in the interwar period, and by 1938, the percentage of Bulgaria's worked land devoted to industrial and garden crops (13.9 per cent) was higher than in Romania, Yugoslavia, Hungary, or Austria. So was the proportion of land devoted to cereals (67.2 per cent). However, among Eastern European countries, Bulgaria's percentage of fallow land was also the highest (10.5 per cent), the nearest being Poland (4.5 per cent) and Yugoslavia (2.7 per cent).

The effects of agricultural parcellization—a combination of the country's rapid population increase in the post-Liberation decades and the universal, gender-egalitarian inheritance system legislated in 1889, and modified in 1906 under peasants' pressure by granting daughters half the amount of land inherited by sons¹¹⁸—became strongly felt in the post-First World War period. While land was in abundance in the immediate post-1879 period due to the emigration of wealthy Turkish landholders from Bulgaria to the Ottoman Empire,¹¹⁹ by the turn of the century it had become less available and more expensive. Land scarcity intensified in the interwar period as division of arable land among children continued. Consequently, the number of small, unconsolidated landholdings continued to grow. Thus, while the agricultural population increased by 18.4 per cent in 1920–1940, the number of landholdings rose by 38.4 per cent, decreasing the average size of landed property from 5.73 hectares in 1926 to 4.31 in 1946. Despite state attempts at land consolidation, the specter of land hunger made itself felt, and by the late 1930s the patchwork of a proliferation of ever smaller, more remote strips became a characteristic of Bulgarian land distribution. The low population density of the country of 42.3 persons per square kilometer in 1910—the lowest in the Balkans—had

¹¹⁸ For further details on Bulgarian inheritance legislation and inheritance practices in the pre-1944 period, see Petko Venedikov, "Belezhki vŭrkhu tcheiza i zestrata po deistvashtoto pravo u nas" [Notes on the dowry according to our current legislation], *Iuridicheski Arkhiv* [Juridical archive], No. 6 (July–August 1934), pp. 489–511.

¹¹⁹ For further details on land seizure and redistribution in the period from 1879 to 1912, see Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918*, pp. 175–188, 347–362.

increased to 55.2 in 1930,¹²⁰ while correspondingly, the population density in the agricultural countryside had by 1931 reached the level of 81.6 persons per 100 hectares of arable farmland. In contrast, the rural population density in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Poland at 59.0, 60.2, 75.0, and 75.6, respectively was markedly lower.¹²¹ This new phenomenon in Bulgarian demography upset the population's economic well-being, and negatively interacted with an additional set of pessimistic factors, such as the absence of any real industrial development or emigrational possibilities for the countryside, and the mounting economic uncertainties of the international market.

As early as 1925, then Prime Minister Liapchev had identified the decrease in arable land and the growth of population in the post-war period as one of the major factors behind Bulgaria's "exclusive" and "tragic" grain deficit in 1924 and 1925.¹²² In 1929, Professor Ianulov had foreseen the dangers of Bulgaria's rapidly increasing population, whose natural and real growth (refugee influx taken into consideration) exceeded significantly the country's agricultural output.¹²³ In the 1930s and in 1940, Bulgarian and international economists and demographers alike charted a direct relationship between the country's practice of insufficient land utilization, slow industrial development, deficit in foreign commerce, lack of emigration opportunities, and excess of agricultural overpopulation.¹²⁴ More than sixty per cent of Bulgarian agricultural holdings were comprised of "small, straggling patches, often a distance apart," and more than fifty per cent of all,

¹²⁰ The increase of the total population density in 1930 has been attributed to the relative absence of civilian deaths from war and disease during 1912–1918 and the subsequent influx of refugees. For further details, see Table 10.1., "Territorial and population changes 1910–1930," in John R. Lampe and Marvin R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550–1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 332; John Lampe, *The Bulgarian Economy in the Twentieth century* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 56.

¹²¹ Doreen Warriner, *Economics of Peasant Farming* (Frank Cass & Ltd., 1964), p. 69.

¹²² Andrei Liapchev, *Stopanskoto Polozhenie na Bulgariia. Rech, Proiznesena pri Otkrivane na VII Redoven Kongres na Sŭiuza na Populiarnite Banki* [The economic situation of Bulgaria: Speech at the VIIth congress of the Association of Popular Banks] (Sofia, 1925), p. 3.

¹²³ Iliia Ianulov, *Economic Bulgaria and the Reparations* (Sofia: 1929), pp. 2–3.

¹²⁴ P. Egorov, in I. Mollov, *Die sozialökonomische Struktur der bulgarischen Landwirtschaft* [The socio-economic structure of Bulgarian agriculture] (Berlin, 1936), p. 152, in Warriner, *Economics of Peasant Farming*, p. 69; Joseph S. Roucek, "Economic geography of Bulgaria," *Economic Geography*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (July 1935), pp. 307–323; N.V. Dolinski, *Proletarizirane na Bŭlgarskoto Zemedelsko Naselenie* [The proletarianization of the Bulgarian agricultural population] (Varna, 1937), pp. 3–9; "Demographic problems of Southeastern Europe," *Population Index*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1941), 84–92, pp. 88–89.

and largely unprofitable holdings, supported five to ten persons. Peasants were in debt to the extent of nine billion leva to banks, cooperative societies, and private persons (according to data from 1935), and their purchasing power was falling (by over thirty per cent in 1930 and 1931, if compared to 1928) while the state was seeking an outlet to foreign markets by reducing prices of agricultural products.¹²⁵ The rising density of agricultural population (defined as agricultural population in respect to agriculturally cultivated land and the cultivated land per person actively engaged in agriculture), combined with a far lower income per head than in the neighboring and other European countries, was acknowledged as the potential source of surplus labor on farms. This generated a rural standard of living, which was clearly insufficient to secure a “normal physiological and cultural development.”¹²⁶

The growth of the population and the consequences of the inheritance system, which granted equal distribution of the plots among all the children of farm owners, had been recognized as the underlying factors for the continuous land parceling, which statistically could be traced back to 1926, but in reality was believed to have gone as far back as 1897.¹²⁷ Indeed, a sampling survey carried out in 1944 by the regional economic chambers revealed that in seven villages despite the fact that land plots had been pooled for the purpose of commassation (land consolidation of farming), the number of farms rose within ten years from 5,408 to 7,663, i.e., by forty-two per cent.¹²⁸

The increase of the total population density in 1930 has been attributed to the relative absence of civilian deaths from war and disease during 1912–1918 and the subsequent influx of refugees. For further details, see Table 10.1 “Territorial and population changes 1910–1930,” in Lampe and Jackson, *Balkan Economic History*, p. 332; John Lampe, *The Bulgarian Economy in the Twentieth Century* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 56;

¹²⁵ Roucek, “Economic geography of Bulgaria,” p. 322; Anastas Totev, *Sŭstoianie na Zemedelska Prenaselenost v Bŭlgariia* [Agricultural surplus population in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa “Khristo G. Danov,” 1940), p. 36. Totev based his studies on research conducted by Bulgarian economists and statisticians, Egorov, Mollov, Mocheva, Cholakov, as well as on international sources.

¹²⁶ Totev, *Agricultural Surplus Population in Bulgaria*, p. 21.

¹²⁷ Dolinski, *The Proletarianization of the Bulgarian Agricultural Population*, pp. 7–8; S.D. Zagoroff, Jenő Végh and Alexander D. Bilimovich, *The Agricultural Economy of the Danubian Countries 1935–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1955), p. 383; Irwin Sanders, “Neighborhoods and neighborly relations in a Bulgarian village,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1939), 532–537, p. 533.

¹²⁸ Zagoroff et al., *The Agricultural Economy of the Danubian countries*, p. 383.

Table 5.1. Cultivated land, population permanently employed in agriculture, capital, and income according to size of the agricultural farms in 1934¹²⁹

Farms according to cultivated land in hectares	Number of farms in %	Cultivated land in %	Permanently employed in agriculture in %	Number of permanently employed in agriculture per hectare	Active capital per hectare cultivated land	Gross income per hectare of cultivated land in levs	Gross income per capita permanently employed in agriculture in levs
Up to 5	63	30	53	1.2	66	12,530	11,137
5–10	26	37	31	0.6	52	10,180	18,010
Over 10	11	33	16	0.2	38	8,130	25,717
Total	100	100	100	0.7	51	-	-

According to the 1926 census, 80.6 per cent of the peasants worked their own land, 16.8 per cent worked on their own and rented land, and only 2.6 per cent had spent their time exclusively upon rented land¹³⁰—at first sight “a pleasing” fact for an agricultural country. Yet, according to a more detailed study of Prof. N. Dolinski in 1933–1934, only 49.1 per cent of the agricultural population could rely exclusively on its agricultural income for its subsistence. 8.7 per cent of peasants supplemented their agricultural income as self-employed craftsmen, while 28.6 per cent had been forced to earn their living as hired workers, either abroad (Romania, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia), or increasingly, once international emigration laws had been tightened, in the cities. The smaller the landholdings, the more likely it was for their owners to resort to hiring out their labor for income: only 4.6 per cent of farmers of landholdings up to 2 hectares derived their sole income from the cultivation of land while just 6 per cent had agriculture as their main income.¹³¹ The vast majority, nearly ninety-per cent of undersized farmers, had been compelled to supplement their earnings with or to derive their living exclusively from hired employment.¹³² Dolinski had

¹²⁹ Joseph S. Roucek, “Economic geography of Bulgaria,” *Economic Geography*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (July 1935), pp. 307–323; Table 3 in Anastas Totev, *Agricultural Surplus Population in Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1940), p. 20.

¹³⁰ Roucek, “Economic geography of Bulgaria,” p. 309.

¹³¹ Dolinski, *The proletarianisation*, pp. 9–10.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

referred to this process as an “imposed” transition from an economically independent position to the subordinate status of a hired labor force, and called it “proletarianization”—a social downgrading of the individual under the impact of overwhelming economic hardship, with far-reaching consequences both for the social organization of the state and the demography of the country. In his view, at a socio-political level, proletarianization inevitably opened the way to internal and national insecurity, especially in “troubled times as ours,” as, regardless of any potential wage increase, the proletariat would always be conscious of its socially inferior status and hence, also receptive to “the arsenal of revolutionary and international ideology.” In contrast, peasant landholders would identify their property as part of the national territory and hence, would always be the natural “iron guard” of the state.¹³³

On the other hand, however, as far as natural growth was concerned,

the worsened living conditions of the Bulgarian population had their repercussion on the latter’s demography, where the influence was most strongly felt by the major bulk of the Bulgarian people, i.e., by its agricultural population, which had been worst affected by the changes in the post-war era.¹³⁴

According to Dolinski, the fertility rates had declined especially in the social group of self-sufficient agricultural farmers. After the sequence of wars between 1912 and 1918, marital fertility had decreased in all social layers, yet at a different pace. Whereas in the pre-war period the marital fertility of the agricultural population had been the highest among all social groups (5.52 children per marriage between 1910 and 1912), after the wars it had retreated from its leading position (3.96 children per marriage between 1924 and 1926). In contrast, workers’ fertility had dropped from 3.86 children per marriage to 3.29 in the period from 1910–1912 to 1924–1926, while that of craftsmen and officials had declined from 3.73 and 3.25 to 3.29 and 2.35, respectively. Initially, the explanation had been sought in the great extent of human losses during the wars, as the predominant part

¹³³ Ibid., p. 3.

¹³⁴ Nikolai Dolinski, *Otraziavane na Sotsialno-stopanskite Procesi v Osnovnite Demografski Iavleniia* [The impact of socio-economic processes on demographic phenomena] (Varna, 1934), pp. 41, 32–40.

of Bulgaria's military force had been recruited amongst her farmers. Yet, thereafter, the continuing decline of the birth rates among the rural population had assumed a permanent quality. It could be explained only in terms of the combined operation of two adverse factors—the continuous deterioration in the rural economy, which, for its part, had provoked a strong personal response among the peasant population, manifested in a drastic fertility check.¹³⁵

As a remedy, Bulgarian observers advocated immediate steps to modernize the country's agriculture and agricultural production. This could only be achieved by reforms—i.e., by “the distribution of land into economic units,” and especially by means of drainage and irrigation—to overcome the increasingly urgent problem of agricultural underdevelopment and to accommodate the surplus population.¹³⁶

In the eyes of *Mnogodetnik*, however, the poverty-stricken, overpopulated agricultural countryside stood in harsh contrast to the numerous state and municipal officials with just one or two children in their family, or who preferred the state of bachelordom. “This is a social inequality,” Ivan Apostolov argued, as it was beyond understanding why those who had fulfilled their sacred duty towards the nation should live in extreme poverty, whereas those with no sense of duty towards the state prospered. Apostolov urged for the state to intervene and to lend these fathers and mothers—“the creators of the Bulgarian citizens of tomorrow,” a rescuing hand. “Otherwise tomorrow might be too late,” he concluded.

Apostolov, however, was one of those League's members who later sided with the temporary executive committee of Minister Gabrovski's supporters. Although his protests mirrored Zhekov's own concerns about large rural families, the latter's approach towards possible remedies to the situation differed substantially. Zhekov, too, placed his hopes on the state's intervention in favor of large families. However, his preferred slogan of action was “God helps those who help themselves.”¹³⁷ As a result, under his leadership, in 1939 the League started the cooperative *Mnogodetnik*—

¹³⁵ Dolinski, *The Impact of Socio-economic Processes on Demographic Phenomena*, pp. 33–34. Dolinski suggested that the results for the miners' group should be ignored because of its particularly small size.

¹³⁶ Totev, *Agricultural Surplus Population in Bulgaria*, pp. 31–33.

¹³⁷ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 17 (26 June 1941), p. 3.

a type of self-supporting building society whose major goal was to circumvent the existing illegal black market system of agricultural products in the country and thus improve the immediate living conditions of large, *mnogodetni*, families. In 1940, the cooperative was reported as having been implemented in practice. Its objective was to facilitate the delivery of agricultural products from the villages straight onto the market and consequently, to avoid the disastrous interference of wholesalers. “Thus the child-rich will be supplied with the necessary goods at the cheapest price, and this will help regulate the market and curb price speculation.”¹³⁸

Table 5.2. Black-market producers’ prices for crops in 1944 (levs per kg)¹³⁹

Commodity	Official price	Black-market price
Wheat	13.8	25
Rye	11.7	36
Oats	9.8	22
Millet	11.9	30
Corn	12.0	30
Castor beans	10.0	22
Hemp fibre	18.0	30
Flax fibre	100.0	210
Dry beans	146.0	200
Potatoes	15.0	26
Cabbage	17.0	17
Onions	9.7	15
Hay	13.2	21

Indeed, according to official Bulgarian data, the black-market producers’ prices for crops exceeded by nearly two or three times the officially set price, and this in a period which was defined by a rapidly dropping agricultural net output—from a total of 23,096 million lev in 1939 to 18,466 million lev in 1944.¹⁴⁰ As a result, the general level of real income in the period of 1940–1945 was pronouncedly lower than in 1935–1939, and in the sec-

¹³⁸ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 1.

¹³⁹ Prokopi Kiranoff, *Natsionalniia Dokhod na Bŭlgariia* [The national income of Bulgaria], (Sofia, 1946), p. 19, derived from Zagoroff, Vêgh, and Bilimovich, *The Agricultural Economy of the Danubian Countries 1935–1945*, p. 392.

¹⁴⁰ See Table 14 in Slavcho Zagoroff et al., *Agricultural Economy of the Danubian Countries*, p. 393.

ond half of the war period it was even lower than in the first.¹⁴¹ Similar observations were made by the members of the National Assembly in their discussions linked to the amendment of the Law for Labor Land Funds in the first half of 1940, and to the misery which was spreading among the rural population and was leaving its negative imprint on its overall fertility.¹⁴² Hence, *Mnogodetnik*'s statement that Zhekov's cooperative initiative had received the active support of all official economic institutions is probably true and that the latter had declared their readiness to collaborate with the League in this field.¹⁴³

The Tŭrnovo Congress of child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents enthusiastically appealed to its members to spread the *Mnogodetni* cooperative initiative all over the country, so that it would embrace all economic activities of large, *mnogodetni* families. The *Mnogodetni* cooperative was perceived as the true way towards their salvation.¹⁴⁴

The 1939 Congress raised the issue of rural poverty, connecting it to the size of families and the miserable conditions small-farm owners had been driven into due to the rapid subdivision of their farms and hence, the necessity of land distribution among rural smallholders. It recommended that families should be granted land from the communal fund lands and the latter distributed among them only according to fixed prices. The current practice of communal land distribution through public auctions had to be abolished as corrupt.¹⁴⁵ In a later meeting with Minister Mitakov, Zhekov insisted that cheap access to garden land and to long-term loans for the

¹⁴¹ Bulgaria's agricultural production recorded a real net growth over the 1939 level only in 1941. In 1943, after a bad harvest, a drought, and exactions of grain needed for the 400,000 army and for exports to Germany, it came to only 91 per cent of the 1939 level. Peasant smallholders reacted to the forced requisitions by concealing grain and by turning to industrial crops and (in 1941) milk production, and eventually, due to growing fodder shortage, to the remaining alternative of fruit and vegetable production. According to Lampe and Jackson, this diversification must have contributed to the severe bread and meat shortage felt by 1942, which resulted in an inflationary price rise of these commodities by 563 per cent over the 1939 level by 1944, and by 738 per cent on the black market. For further details, see Lampe and Jackson, *Balkan Economic History*, table 13.5., pp. 533–537; Zagoroff et al., *The Agricultural Economy*, pp. 423–426, 433–437; Lampe, *The Bulgarian Economy*, pp. 110–112.

¹⁴² See the speech of Ivan Rusev, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, I RS, 9 M* (12 March 1940), pp. 154–156; Serafim Georgiev, *ibid.*, pp. 160–161; Nikola Sakarov, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, I RS, 10 M* (13 March 1940), pp. 186–187; Stojan Omarchevski, *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, I RS, 11 M* (14 March 1940), pp. 213–221; Deni Kostov, *ibid.*, pp. 221–223.

¹⁴³ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 3 (14 November 1939), p. 1.

construction of economical housing had to be facilitated for large, *mnogodetni* families, and that their income taxes had to be reduced.¹⁴⁶

Within the next two years of activities, the distribution or redistribution of land to large, *mnogodetni* families became the main target of the League's policies. In his New Year address in *Mnogodetnik*, Zhekov presented the League's goal to work for the fulfillment of the idea to "have no single hungry, naked, homeless person in our fertile, golden country."¹⁴⁷ Ways were sought to influence the existing legislation on land property and land distribution by pointing out the weaknesses of the Labor Farm Law and the necessity for amending it and subjecting it to the needs of large, *mnogodetni* families: "The (communal) Fund lands are being used by the wealthy childless peasants as they are distributed by public auction. But what should poor, *mnogodetni* families do?" exclaimed P.D. Stoianov, secretary and treasurer of the *Mnogodetni* Parents' branch in the village of Matsa, concluding that the best tactic would be to hand over the fund lands to large, *mnogodetni* families. This corrupt auction approach, Stoianov claimed, had been extended to the distribution of garden plots, which would also become the property of richer and childless farmers. Out of the seven garden plots placed on auction in his village, five had been taken by a single person. The latter had no real need of them but used them for his further personal enrichment. The law clearly opened opportunities for more prosperous farmers to buy additional plots of land, which they rented out to poor and large families for cultivation.¹⁴⁸ However, the communal land funds drew on the unutilized stock-breeding lands, as well as on the landholdings of schools, culture clubs, and churches, and their size was formidable. If handed over to the *mnogodetni* parents, they would have provided enormous relief. "Let's amend the law", S.T. from the village of Vülchedrum demanded. As the minister of agriculture, Ivan Bagrianov, had already started working in this field, the League confirmed that it would be pleased to assist him.¹⁴⁹

The fight on the part of the League for a just land redistribution, which was to include large, *mnogodetni* families, seems to have been rather

¹⁴⁶ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 1 (22 June 1939), p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 4 (1 January 1940), pp. 1–2.

¹⁴⁸ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 7 (1 March 1940), p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 5 (30 January 1940), p. 4. Similar letters were sent to *Mnogodetnik* by local correspondents and branch members from other villages.

successful.¹⁵⁰ The amendment of the Law for Labor Land Funds, passed in the National Assembly on 29 May 1940, was the first official legal document to make use of the term *mnogodetni* in the body of its text. A short time later, on 6 July 1940, the Ministry of Agriculture and State Property, represented by its Department of Land Property and Compensation, sent out to the League a carbon copy of its instruction No. 11,087 about land redistribution and compensation signed by the Department's director, T. Bakürdzhev. In this, article 11 of the Law for Labor Land Funds gave members of large families the right to demand land for their personal use if needed.

The League did not rest with this achievement. Its board closely followed the practical realization of the land-related legislation and actively interfered if traces of corruption were observed. Thus in his New Year declaration on 1 January 1941, Zhekov outlined the need for another amendment of the land law as one of the primary goals to be achieved.¹⁵¹ "Are child-rich parents really contented with the current land law?" Zhekov enquired. He pointed out that indeed, Minister Bagrianov had created the law with the single purpose to have the land of the various stockbreeding, school, and culture club funds allocated to large families. However, his good intentions had been frustrated in practice as at places the committees in charge had fixed extremely high rents per hectare, and elsewhere the child-rich were entirely left out from the land redistribution. In response, the board of the League of the *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents issued circular letter No. 15, which urged the League's members to provide detailed information on all shortfalls in order that they should be corrected retrospectively. In his instructions to the membership, Zhekov emphasized forcefully that any complaint reported had to be detailed and reasoned.¹⁵² He suggested that the Law for Labor Land Funds itself was to become part of the agenda of the forthcoming congress in March 1941.¹⁵³ Eventually, a new Labor Farms Law was passed in May 1941. The League's contribution to its drafting and enactment needs further investigation.

¹⁵⁰ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 9 (15 September 1940), p. 2.

¹⁵¹ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 10 (1 January 1941), p. 2.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *Mnogodetnik*, No. 11 (6 March 1941), pp. 1–2.

The state takeover of the League's central executive board in summer 1941 brought any initiatives of the child-rich to a stop. Nevertheless, some local branches continued sending in to Petŭr Gabrovski, Minister of the Interior and People's Health, their demands and suggestions for economic and agricultural improvements of the lot of the Bulgarian *mnogodetni* in connection with the Bill for Large Families, which preparation the latter was supervising.

CHAPTER V

Petūr Gabrovski and the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families



1. Ideological background

It was Petūr Gabrovski, Minister of the Interior and People's Health, who imposed his own vision of a Bill for Bulgarian Large, *Mnogodetni* Families on the National Assembly for discussion and acceptance. By 31 March 1943, however, when Bulgaria's first pronatalist law was enacted, the political situation of the country had changed dramatically, both internationally and domestically. In 1941, Bulgaria had formally joined the Tripartite Pact and hence the Second World War. In a peaceful, revisionist act she had reacquired the territories of Southern Dobrudzha to which she had long aspired and secured a much-coveted outlet to the Aegean. Yet at the same time, her new, pro-German government was "crucified" between the presence of German troops on Bulgarian territories and the intensified, pro-Soviet underground activities of the extreme left. The exceedingly frail internal political equilibrium had resulted in "the separation of the State from the people."¹ Social legislation like the Bill was passed in a political atmosphere in which Bogdan Filov's cabinets "did not have sufficient support among the people," and "the state apparatus was not secure enough for the govern-

¹ Michael Padev, *Escape from the Balkans* (London: Caswell, 1943), p. 232. Pandev, however, was not an unbiased witness, leaning strongly to the political left. As the official correspondent of *The Times* in Bulgaria, he had also been close to the British authorities there—a fact which brought him imprisonment and detention in a concentration camp once Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact. He managed to escape to Britain in 1942.

For further details on the political attitudes of the Bulgarian population in the early 1940s, see also Nisan Oren, *Bulgarian Communism: The Road to Power 1934–1944* (New York—London: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 153; George Rendel, *The Sword and the Olive: Recollections of Diplomacy and the Foreign Service 1913–1954* (London: John Murray, 1957), pp. 163–164, 181; Marshall Lee Miller, *Bulgaria during the Second World War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975).

ment to rule by fiat.”² The new geo-political reality resonated widely in the thinking of Bulgarian politicians, leaving their decisive imprint on the Law for Large Bulgarian Families.

Gabrovski, a distinguished Sofia attorney and member of the Board of the Association of Bulgarian Solicitors and of the Supreme Council of Solicitors in Bulgaria, came to office with Prof. Bogdan Filov's first government (16 February 1940–11 April 1942) and remained Minister of the Interior and People's Health until 14 September 1943.³ A sturdy believer in a strong centralized state⁴ which would protect the rights but also the needs of its citizens by subjecting their lives to the interest of the nation,⁵ Gabrovski is a controversial and underexplored figure in Bulgarian history. It was under his supervision and recommendations that the Law for People's Health was amended in favor of all mothers in 1940 and the Law for the Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families was passed. At the same time, his name became associated with the establishment and leadership of the Guardians of the Advancement of the Bulgarian National Spirit, a fascist-type organization,⁶ and with the politically and socially infamous

² Dimităr Peshev, *Memoirs*, in Tsvetan Todorov (ed.), *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), pp. 137–183, here p. 164. Although these lines refer to the attempted deportation of the Bulgarian Jews from Bulgaria in March 1943, their context applies equally well to Bulgaria's domestic atmosphere in the entire period of 1941–1944. For a historical “portrait” of King Boris, notorious for his concerns to stabilize his rule in Bulgaria, see Nikolai Poppetrov, “Obrazăt na Tsar Boris III v dnevnii red na bŭlgarskoto obshtestvo, 1918–1943” [The image of King Boris III on the agenda of Bulgarian society, 1918–1943], *Istoricheski Pregled* [Historical review], No. 1–2 (2002), pp. 44–74. In addition, Liubomir Lulchev, the king's spiritual adviser, frequently referred in his *Diary* to Boris's efforts to secure his political position by either propelling weak politicians into power, or attempting to inspire the implementation of social policies. For further details, see Vaniio Vŭlkov, *Tsariat i Negoviiat Sŭvetnik: Kniga za Tsar Boris III i Negoviiia Sŭvetnik Liubomir Lulchev* [The king and his adviser: A book about King Boris III and his adviser, Liubomir Lulchev] (Sofia: Voennoizdatelski kompleks “Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets,” 1993), pp. 69–70, 126–128.

³ Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 103–104.

⁴ Konstantin Muraviev, *Sŭbitiia i Khora. Spomeni* [Events and people: Memoirs] (Sofia: Bŭlgarski Pisatel, 1992), pp. 468.

⁵ See *Rech na Ministŭra na vŭtreshnite raboti Petŭr Gabrovski po otgovora na tronnoto slovo, proizneseno na 6 XII. 1940 pred XXV obiknoveno narodno sŭbraniene* [The response of Petŭr Gabrovski, Minister of the Interior, to the Royal speech, delivered to the XXVth Ordinary National Assembly on 6 December 1940] (Sofia: Izdanie na Narodnoto Sŭbranie, Dŭrzhaven Pechat, 1941); Speech of Petŭr Gabrovski, *Stenografski Dnevniitsi na XXV Obiknoveno Narodno Sŭbranie* [Minutes of the XXVth ONA], 14 *Zasedanie* [14 M] (20 March 1940), p. 249.

⁶ The National Guardians organization [Ratnichestvo za Napredŭka na Bŭlgarshitnata], alongside the Union of Bulgarian National Legions [Sŭiuz na Bŭlgarskite Natsionalni Legioni], two fascist-type organizations, gained prominence in the late thirties and early forties. According to Frederick Chary, they maintained connections with various German organizations, including Himmler's SS. The exact nature of these connections, though, is obscure. The Bulgarian Legionnaires were headed by Khristo Lukov, ex-Minister of War (1935–1938), who was assassinated in 1943 by members of the communist underground movement, and by Nikola Zhekov, ex-Commander-in-Chief of Bulgarian forces in the First World War. The leader of the National Guardians

Law for the Defense of the Nation of 24 December 1940.⁷ This was of an anti-Semitic nature—although it was a measure forced on Bulgaria’s minister of the interior under pressure from outside.⁸ Obviously a strong personality, his methods of implementing Filov’s political program bordered

(*Ratnitsi*) was Professor Asen Kantardzhiev, while Gabrovski was one of the co-founders. Yet, as has been pointed out in Chapter 1, fascism had no real mass manifestations in Bulgaria. The political figure of Petür Gabrovski, however, remains understudied, even though his name has been mentioned in several historical studies, including his controversial links to Bulgarian freemasonry. For further details on the *Ratnitsii* organization and other fascist movements in interwar Bulgaria, see Poppetrov, *Fashizmut v Bulgariia* [Fascism in Bulgaria] (Sofia: Kama, 2008); idem, “Ideino-politicheskiye shvashtaniia na Süüza na Bülgarskiye Natsionalni Legioneri i Ratnitsi za Napredüka na Bülgarshtinata v godinite na vtorata svetovna voina” [The ideological and political views of the Union of Bulgarian National Legionnaires and the National Guardians for Bulgarian Progress during the Second World War], *Istoricheski Pregled* [Historical review], No. 6 (1991), pp. 53–67. For information of Bulgarian politicians and their links to or direct involvement with Bulgarian freemasonry, see Velichko Georgiev, *Masonstvo v Bulgariia: Pronikvane, Organizatsiia, Razvitiie i Rolii do Sredata na Tridesette Godini na XX Vek* [Freemasonry in Bulgaria: Infiltration, organization, development, and role until the mid-1930s] (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo Publishing House, 1986).

For a corresponding literature on Bulgarian right-wing movements in English, see Frederick Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940–1944* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), pp. 7–8, 36. For further details on Eastern European fascism in general, see “Ideological currents in the interwar period,” in Richard J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 152–176, 159–168.

⁷ The Law for the Defense of the Nation was prepared upon the return from Germany in the summer of 1940 of Aleksandür Belev, head of the Commissariat for Jewish Issues (*komisarstvo po evreiskite vüprosi*) and a member of the *Ratnitsi*. Belev had been invited to chair the Commissariat by Gabrovski himself. The proposed law aimed at registering all Jews in Bulgaria and limiting their right to participate in the economic and political life of the country, as well as in society at large. Most importantly, however, it aspired to curb the “wealth of the Jews” by confiscating it for state purposes. Although racist in its nature, the motives behind the law did not provide any racist rationale for its unexpected appearance on the political agenda of the country. In the words of Adolf Beckerle, Nazi ambassador to Sofia in 1943, Bulgarians in general were unable to grasp the essence of the “Jewish question,” which did not exist in the same form in Bulgaria as in the Reich. “Raised partly among Greeks, Armenians, Gypsies, and Turks, the average Bulgarian does not fathom the significance of the fight against the Jews, especially since he is not concerned with racial issues,” Beckerle complained. The law was supported by certain economic factions in Bulgaria; yet, in the words of Dimitür Peshev, vice-chairman of the XXVth ONA and initiator of the parliamentary protest letter against the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria-proper (according to the Dannecker–Belev agreement) in March 1943, it had provoked a social shock. It had been presented to the National Assembly as “a purely domestic affair,” the resolution of which had to be sought on purely domestic grounds, while the restrictions on the Jewish population, however painful, were meant to be temporary and were not to be taken to extremes. The law had been voted and accepted by Parliament as just another attempt at bringing Bulgarian policies into line with those of Germany—policies which it was hoped would result in Bulgaria’s eventually attaining her principal territorial objectives. For further details in English, see Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews*, p. 37; Vicki Tamir, *Bulgaria and her Jews: The History of a Dubious Symbiosis* (New York: Sepher–Hermon Press for Yeshiva University Press, 1979), pp. 166–167, 189–190; Peshev, *Memoirs*, pp. 140–148. For details in German, see Hans-Joachim Hoppe, *Bulgarien—Hitlers eigenwilliger Verbündeter: eine Fallstudie zur nationalsozialistischen Südosteuropapolitik* [Bulgaria—Hitler’s self-willed ally: A case study of national socialist policies in Southeast Europe] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979), pp. 93–96, 140.

⁸ The Law had been accepted with mixed feelings by the cabinet, and since the start of its implementation there had been repeated complaints by the Third Reich about the government’s high tolerance toward the Bulgarian Jews. This was felt by the Germans to be bordering on resistance toward the activities of the Commissariat for Jewish Issues and, especially, toward its German-trained head, Belev. King Boris, who had given his con-

on authoritarian censorship. Professor Konsulov was not the only one to protest against Gabrovski's ways of handling different, "politically incorrect" views and statements.⁹ The minutes of the National Assembly recall his brisk, intolerant dealings with the tactful ex-prime minister Mushanov¹⁰ and the irritable ex-prime minister Aleksandŭr Tsankov,¹¹ the complaints of Dr Ivan Iotov of the lack of transparency in the means whereby legislative modifications were occasionally initiated,¹² and his unexpected maneuvers aimed at testing the public "barometer" about intended novel

sent to racial laws, had revealed to his counselor, Liubomir Lulchev, his own uneasiness and justified himself by saying that he had tried to "anticipate" the Germans, rather than having to submit to a German "diklat." According to Peshev, the government never acknowledged its role in the first deportation of Jews from the "new" territories of Macedonia and Thrace, nor did it ever take responsibility for its part in the later developments. Prime Minister Filov himself, while brutally reproaching the deputies for signing the protest letter against the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews from Bulgaria-proper, had avoided mentioning the cause of the problem—as if it had never existed. Neither Parliament nor society found out the exact content of the Dannecker–Belev agreement, nor did they learn who authorized its signing. According to Walter Schellenberg, the German espionage chief, most of the Bulgarian ministers, including Gabrovski, were not trustworthy. Schellenberg reported that when three hundred Jews had marched on the Ministry of the Interior carrying a protest petition, Gabrovski had met them in the courtyard, accepted their petition, and reassured them that they "should not be disturbed: the worst had already passed." Gabrovski had argued with Commissar Belev, contending that the palace and the cabinet wanted a milder Jewish policy, and Schellenberg was disturbed that the minister of the interior had not yet forbidden Sofia's Jews from entering public spaces. Peshev, too, in his *Memoirs*, emphasized that on 19 September 1942, Gabrovski had declared that "it was time to begin putting the Jewish question behind us. The whole issue had taken on unwarranted proportions and we needed to apply the law in a reasonable, humane and moral way." When confronted with the open protest against the Dannecker–Belev deportation agreement on 9 March 1943, Gabrovski had reassured the deputies that no action would be taken against the Jews. Yet, as Peshev observed, "he was speaking in the kind of platitudes one might use to extricate oneself from an awkward situation." For further details in English, see Stephan Grueff, *Crown of Thorns* (Lanham—London: Madison Books, 1987), pp. 323–324; Tamir, *Bulgaria and her Jews*, pp. 198–199, 205–206; Peshev, *Memoirs*, pp. 155–166, 174–175; Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews*, pp. 138–152. For details in German, see Hoppe, *Bulgaria—Hitler's Self-willed Ally*, pp. 95–96, 138–139. See also excerpts from Gabriele Nissim's book on D. Peshev, *L'uomo che fermò Hitler* [The man who stopped Hitler], on <http://peshev.org/gn-washe.htm>; last accessed 28 March 2009.

⁹ See the speech of MP Dimitŭr Andreev, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), p. 950. MP Petko Stainov voiced similar protests against Gabrovski. Ibid. Interestingly, Chary describes Andreev as "a leading anti-Semite" in the National Assembly. It seems as if Gabrovski had his own way with Bulgarian Parliament and society, and had little trust even in his presumed fellow-thinkers. See Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews*, p. 153.

¹⁰ See *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, I RS, 14 M* (20 March 1940), pp. 250–251. Nikola Mushanov (1872–1951): one of the leaders of the Democratic Party, he opposed Bulgaria's involvement in World War II against the Allies and supported Bulgaria's reorientation toward the Soviet Union (Aug. 1944). Mushanov was a long-term national deputy, chair of the XXIVth ONA (1938–1939), Minister of the Interior and of People's Health (1910–1911, 1918–1919, 1931) and of Foreign Affairs and Cults (1931–19 May 1934), and Prime Minister (1932–16 May 1934). Sentenced by the People's Tribunal to one-year imprisonment, he was arrested again by the State Security police (1951) and died under "unresolved circumstances." For further details, see Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 309–311.

¹¹ See *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), p. 958.

¹² See *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, II RS, 39 M* (15 January 1941), p. 1035.

regulations.¹³ His monograph, *The Political Demands of the Moment*, which he finished on 25 December 1943 (just one month after his removal from Filov's last cabinet) offered a justification for his methods of dealing with his political opponents. It defined "an extremely powerful and authoritarian rule" as the only means of a legitimate state government to "organize the unity of the nation and thus serve the nation's interests."¹⁴ Simultaneously, it portrayed Gabrovski as a person who followed his own prescriptions in submitting his personal interests to the well-being of the common good, i.e., to the nation and the state.¹⁵ The margins of what may have been a first draft of his monograph bear a note in passing, which may also summarize his views and life: "It is not enough to love Bulgaria—one must serve her, too."¹⁶

By September 1943, however, Gabrovski had grown immensely unpopular both in Parliament and among the public.¹⁷ Though asked by the prime minister himself to hand in the resignation statement of Filov's second government in November 1943, he was never invited to join Filov's third cabinet. Instead, he was replaced by Docho Khristov, lawyer, politician, and presenter of the Bill for the Defense of the Nation and of the Bill for a State Gendarmerie.¹⁸ Although extremely hurt and taken aback, Gabrovski reassured Filov of his loyalty.¹⁹ His last public appearance was at the People's Tri-

¹³ See MP Dimitŭr Andreev's query why a "fake" Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families had been provided to the mass media, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), pp. 949–950.

¹⁴ Petŭr Gabrovski, *Politicheskite Zadachi na Momenta* [The political demands of the moment] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa "Khudozhnik," 1943), p. 9.

¹⁵ Ibid. According to scattered pieces of information, Gabrovski seems to have applied his idea of subjecting personal interests to the common good to both his treatment of the underground resistance movement (by urging Chief of Police, Geshev, to better "curb his Communists"), and to himself. According to K. Muraviev (briefly Prime Minister 2–8 September 1944), after the political takeover in 1944, Gabrovski, who was then in Turkey, returned (for non-stated reasons) to Bulgaria. While awaiting his trial, he had asked his fellow-detainee, Muraviev, to tell his wife to change the surname of their children, so that the latter would not bear the consequences of their father's deeds. For further details, see Georgi Markov, *Kambanite Biat Sami. Nasilie i Politika v Bŭlgariia 1919–1947* [The bells toll by themselves: Violence and politics in Bulgaria, 1919–1947] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Ministerstvoto na Otbranata "Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets," 1994), p. 134; Muraviev, *Memoirs*, pp. 468–469.

¹⁶ "Ne triabva samo da obichash Bŭlgariia, no triabva i da i sluzhish." See F. 264, op. 1, a. E. 49, l. 137.

¹⁷ Bogdan Filov, *Dnevnik* [Diary] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Otechestven Front," 1990), p. 617; Evdokia Filova, *Dnevnik: Mai 1939–15 Avgust 1944* [Diary: May 1939–15 August 1944], (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Khristo Botev," 1992), p. 141.

¹⁸ Docho Khristov (1895–1945), who was among the organizers of the 9 June coup in 1923, became a member of the Demokratcheski Sgovor (Democratic Alliance), chairman of the board of the Private Cooperative Bank, and finally national deputy in the XXVth Ordinary National Assembly (1940–1944). See Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, pp. 492–493.

¹⁹ Other candidates for the position of minister of the interior and people's health were D. Khristov, Dr Ivan Beshkov, Dr Rafailov, M. Iotov, Dr Ivan Vazov, etc. Filov, however, stated that Gabrovski had recommended Partov and had expressed his appreciation for being counseled. For further details, see Filov, *Diary*, p. 617.

bunal in 1945, documented by a picture of the ministers under trial; in the photo he was sitting apparently isolated and self-absorbed, next to a group of his political ex-associates, who seem more animated and assured.²⁰

Gabrovski's home-oriented policy has to be viewed entirely in the light of Filov's promulgated foreign and domestic program. The latter envisaged generic measures for the support of the economically and socially weak, for the eradication of unemployment, for the material and cultural care of industrial workers, for the modernization of the economy, and for the living conditions and the hygiene of the rural population.²¹ Indeed, in the field of social legislation, it was the period of 1940–1943 that witnessed the extension of land reforms and of insurance and retirement provisions to almost all social sectors. These included the laws for retirement and sickness benefits of workers in state mines (1940) and in private mines (1943), of agricultural workers (1941), of craftsmen (1941), and of intellectuals (1941).²² The ideological background of this welfare policy, according to Filov, was to be complemented with an enhanced feeling of duty on the part of state officials, with the simplification of the bureaucratic apparatus, and with the subjugation of personal interests and of capital to the service of the nation and the state. Finally, welfare policy was perceived as part of the state's struggle against communism, plutocracy, and political dissension, in accord with the Law for the Defense of the Nation.²³ The final goal of this domestic policy was to coordinate all welfare legislation and practices through all social sectors in order to achieve

a powerful and socially just national Bulgarian state in accordance with the principles of the new European order. It is based on the idea that the security, progress and prosperity of the Bulgarian nation are mandatory conditions for the well-being of each Bulgarian, and that Bulgaria will become successful only when her rule is founded on hierarchy, discipline and responsibility.²⁴

²⁰ Polia Meshkova and Dinio Sharlanov, *Bŭlgarskata Gilotina: Tainite Mekhanizmi na Narodniia Sŭd* [The Bulgarian guillotine: The secret mechanisms of the People's Tribunal] (Sofia: Agentsia Demokratsia, 1994), picture 4.

²¹ Bogdan Filov, *Ideologia i Programa na Upravenieto na Bŭlgariia* [Ideology and program of the Bulgarian government] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa "Khudozhnik," 1942), p. 9.

²² Iliia Ianulov, "Zavetut na pokoiniia tsar na bŭlgarite za sotsialna sprevedlivost" [The deceased king's will for social justice], *Izvestiia na Bŭlgarskoto Drŭzhestvo za Sotsialen Napredŭk* [Bulletin of the Bulgarian Association for Social Progress], No. 1–2 (1943), pp. 1–4, here p. 2.

²³ Filov, *Ideology and Program of the Bulgarian Government*, pp. 9–13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Both in his later monograph and in his earlier response to the royal speech of 6 December 1940, Gabrovski emphasized that it was the demands imposed by the historical moment which were shaping Bulgaria's internal policy. "We are living in an entirely new epoch. For years, the old world has been crumbling away and another one has been being created instead. A new spirit has developed, new ideas and new programs are taking over."²⁵ Caught up in the turmoil of changes attributed to the effects of enormous global scientific and technical progress²⁶ and to the ruthless impact of the Second World War, Bulgaria was but a small country with no status in the world of international politics, but grappling to secure her place, her rights and her interests.²⁷ Hence, it was up to the state to emerge as the regulator intervening in Bulgaria's public life. While the state in the old days of liberalism had merely served to defend the country's territory and protect the property, honor and life of the citizens, the new era had endowed it with new functions, i.e., with the control and regulation of economic life, and the monitoring of interpersonal relations and conflicts in society.²⁸ Being an agricultural country with no large store of capital and accumulated wealth, the economic progress of Bulgaria and her material well-being heavily depended on and could only be attained by the material progress and material welfare of all its small owners and hard-working peasants and citizens, who represented ninety-five per cent of the Bulgarian people. To sustain their lives and their happiness, the latter relied completely on their own efforts and production.²⁹ Bound for its progress and prosperity to the happiness of its *Volk*, the new Bulgarian state "of the working people" had to attend to their needs and create proper living and working conditions for them:

Whenever we speak of social justice, we have to understand justice for the Bulgarian countryside and for all laboring manual or intellectual employees. Whenever we speak of economic growth, we have to take under consideration the income of the agricultural producers and of the working masses. Their

²⁵ *The Response of Petür Gabrovski, Minister of Interior, to the Royal Speech*, p. 4; *The Political Demands of the Moment*, p. 4.

²⁶ *The Response of Petür Gabrovski*, p. 4.

²⁷ Gabrovski, *The Political Demands of the Moment*, pp. 3–4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

income brings the increase of the national income and with it the economic progress of the whole nation.³⁰

It was erroneous to believe that by changing the system and the ownership of the means of production, social injustice would be eradicated. Social support, which would do away with poverty and starvation, could only be implemented by replacing piecemeal acts of charity with a coordinated state policy for the redistribution of resources.³¹ Gabrovski additionally embraced the encouragement of births and relief for large, *mnogodetni* families as substantial goals of this domestic policy.³² These goals came along with other urgent requirements, such as healthcare for the population as a whole, free medical treatment for the needy, and public assistance for the socially disadvantaged. All this was envisaged within the framework of the new state functions, whose final objective was a “mighty, just, and well organized Bulgarian state, which will provide a real political, social and cultural stronghold for each Bulgarian and will meet the demands of our contemporary life and extraordinary times.”³³

Yet, the motives emphasized behind the demand for state coordinated social policy in Gabrovski’s monograph diverged from some passages of his original response to the Royal speech. A careful reading of his speech in Parliament reveals that public welfare was a means rather than an end in his home policy. Social policy, alongside economic policy and the regulation of social life, was needed to guarantee domestic peace in the country as well as collective security. They were the essential prerequisites for a strong, powerful state capable of responding to the demands and requirements of international affairs.³⁴ Civil rights had changed their essence: once, they had guaranteed the rights of the individual alone, whereas now their range was defined by the interests of the society and of the state. “Today’s citizens are fully aware of what kind of civil rights and what scope of civil rights they need. Today’s citizens—foremost, the sensible, tough Bulgarian peasants—do not seek the civil rights of the past. *Today, Bulgarians seek*

³⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

³¹ *The Response of Petŭr Gabrovski*, pp. 9–10.

³² Ibid., p. 22.

³³ Ibid., p. 20.

³⁴ Speech of Petŭr Gabrovski, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IRS, 14 M* (20 March 1940), pp. 248–251.

security for their state."³⁵ Hence, "the unity, oneness in thought, harmony in action" of the Bulgarian nation were seen as the ultimate prop of the state. Gabrovski's visions were repeated by other national deputies, and were related to parliamentary debates on further legislation such as the Youth Organization Bill in December 1940, and were directly associated with the looming threat of the war:

We already feel the heat of the fire as military battles are being fought along the frontiers of a neighboring state, with which we share a 480 km-long common border-line. How should we ward off the danger? There is one phrase, one thought, which is gaining universal acceptance: the unity of the nation, the unity of our *Volk* is the safety-shield against these menacing events.³⁶

The perils of the Second World War, which Bulgaria joined on 1 March 1941, seem, then, to have forced Gabrovski to merge the ideas of individual rights with those of national duties in his domestic welfare program.

2. The Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families

LEGISLATIVE PREPARATIONS

The archival files of the Ministry of the Interior and People's Health hold the drafts of three different bills focusing on birth increase. One of them, the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families,³⁷ was the one approved by Gabrovski and eventually presented to the National Assembly for consideration. The authors of the other two bills, however, are unspecified, nor are there any indications of precisely when they were drafted, either. Called respectively the "Law for Facilitating and Encouraging Marriages and for Assisting the Large, *Mnogodetni*, Families in Bulgaria (A Project),"³⁸ and Bill for the Race and the Family,³⁹ both of them incor-

³⁵ Ibid., p. 249, my emphasis (S.B.)

³⁶ Speech of MP Slaveiko Vasilev, in *Minutes of the XXV ONA, II RS, 28 M* (17 December 1940), p. 613.

³⁷ F. 264, op. 1, a.e. 196, l. 3–11.

³⁸ Ibid., l. 66–72.

³⁹ Ibid., l. 73–76.

porated elements of the basic ideology of the final Law for the Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families, though they lacked its detailed legal and financial elaborations.

A distinctive characteristic of the Bill for the Race and the Family which distinguished it from the final law was its attempt to introduce strict eugenic measures aimed at preserving the qualities of the Bulgarian nation and encouraging racially beneficial marriages. It envisaged the establishment of a powerful Institute for the Race and the Family at the General Directorate of People's Health, entrusted with the task of studying the peculiar characteristics of the Bulgarian nation. It was expected to define the racially important qualities worthy to be encouraged and transmitted in the genetic stock of the nation, and to map out the racial deficiencies to be restricted and eradicated. Amongst the duties of the proposed Institute was the demarcation of the fundamental principles for marriage and family education, and the preliminary approval of every piece of legislation touching upon the race, marriages, families, and birth rates.

The preparation of a Bill for the Race and the Family, which incorporated elements of negative eugenics and racial hygiene, was preceded and legitimated by a long-lasting eugenic discourse in the extreme right-wing medical and psychiatric circles in Bulgaria. This debate had begun in the 1920s and grew sharper in the late 1930s and early 1940s, under the impact of the 1933 German Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring. Following the Nazi-type model, its "hard-core" adherents had discussed ways of cleansing the national body from "contamination" and boosting the general health. They had, partially, accepted sterilization, castration, clinical abortion, and social isolation as a suitable approach to eliminate the target-group of hereditary "unfit" "degenerates" (defined in both biological and social terms). This included certain categories of the physically disabled and the feeble-minded and asocial elements, especially sexual deviants.⁴⁰ Yet, radical Bulgarian eugenicists did not attribute biological "degeneration" to a defective "Bulgarian" genome, as the possibility of unsound biological stock was precluded in the light of an innate, "native,"

⁴⁰ Gergana Mircheva, "Bŭlgarskiiat evgenichen proekt ot 20-te i 30-te godini na minaliia vek i normativniia kod na 'rodnoto'" [The Bulgarian eugenic project in the 1920s and 1930s and the normative code of the "native"], *Kritika i Humanizim* [Critique and humanism], No. 17 (2004), pp. 207–220, here pp. 207, 210, 211.

Bulgarian vitality. On the contrary, degeneration was interpreted as the outcome of an unfavorable historical combination between the centuries-long “Turkish yoke” and the stress wrought by the onset of modernization and the sequence of wars. These had challenged and strained the collective body, and their consequences had to be both medically and legislatively removed.⁴¹ The native Bulgarian cultural setting,⁴² the restricted authority of medical experts outside their own professional circle, and significantly, the limited finances of the Bulgarian state to set a gigantic eugenic machine in motion, disqualified the negative eugenic project as “Utopian.”⁴³ A “home-grown” sense of humanism, which also emerged in subsequent legislative discussions, seemed to have ruled out the Bill for the Race and the Family from becoming finally acceptable.

In contrast to the negatively selective nature of the Bill for the Race and the Family, the second legal option—the Law for Facilitating and Encouraging Marriages and for Assisting Large, *Mnogodetni* Families in Bulgaria (A Project)—exclusively focused on welfare provisions. It defined family benefits as poverty “relief,” rather than as an incentive for the creation of large families. Although allowances were to be granted from the fourth child onwards, the Project extended its benefits to children up to the age of fourteen, or nineteen if still in professional training or education or if suffering from a disabling illness.

INFLUENCES AND MOTIVATION

It is questionable whether Gabrovski authored the first draft of the Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families, which was issued in 1942, sent out to the various ministries for comments and feedback, and finally presented before the Parliament. During the official parliamentary debates, Dimitŭr Saradzhov, the newly-appointed (by Gabrovski) leader of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents, referred to Gabrovski as the “presenter of

⁴¹ Mircheva, “The Bulgarian eugenic project,” pp. 212–214.

⁴² See R. Daskalov’s argument that Bulgarian eugenicists were preoccupied with the theoretical dissemination of German achievements in the field of eugenics, rather than with their implementation in practice. The typical Bulgarian eugenic discourse of the period centered on the historical origins of the proto-Bulgarians and on the ethnogenesis of Bulgarians in general. For further details, see Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society 1878–1939*, II, pp. 73–75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

the Bill” rather than its author,⁴⁴ thus leaving the issue open. Yet, it seems likely that it was Gabrovski’s personal choice to single out this particular Bill for Large Bulgarian Families from all three bills apparently available to him, as the numerous remarks on its copy are in marked contrast to the clean, untouched pages of the other two.

The stated rationale behind the initial draft of the Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families emphasized its pronatalist nature coupled to a nation-building program. Its stated justification was the need “to protect and increase the life force of the Bulgarian nation”—a goal which could only be achieved if “a normal population growth is secured.”⁴⁵ Natural population growth was defined as “the difference between birth numbers and mortality numbers,” and hence it was concluded that “the bigger the number of births and smaller the number of deaths, the bigger the natural population growth will be.” Gabrovski noted that Bulgaria’s demographic data were far from reassuring; for, although obvious success had been achieved in reducing the mortality rate—from 23 per thousand between 1909 and 1912 to 14.6 in the period of 1933–1936, the fertility rates were distinctly in decline, and hence natural population growth had been negative over the past thirty years.⁴⁶ His statement reiterated data presented earlier by the demographers Mishaikov and Zagorov. Whether he was aware of the further, intensified decline in birth-rates in the 1930s and early 1940s, remains obscure.⁴⁷

Gabrovski’s exposé echoed Zagorov’s earlier findings on the state of Bulgarian demography and sided with some of Mishaikov’s outlined pronatalist measures.⁴⁸ In his draft of the Preamble to the Bill for Large, *Mno-*

⁴⁴ Speech of Dimitŭr Saradzhev, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 44 M* (24 February 1943), p. 940.

⁴⁵ “On the necessity of a Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families,” F. 264k, op. 1, a.e. 196, l. 33

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 33–34.

⁴⁷ According to the United Nation’s Demographic Yearbook of 1948, crude births in Bulgaria had dropped from 31.5 in 1932 to 22.7 in 1942, including data from Southern Dobrudzha from the beginning of 1941. In 1942, Zagorov was still head of the Statistical Office, while Mishaikov was head of the Department of Theoretical Statistics, and hence both were well placed to know about population developments. These data, however, were not made available to the general Bulgarian public.

Crude births for Bulgaria 1932–1945

Year	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
	31.5	29.2	30.1	26.4	25.9	24.3	22.8	21.4	22.2	21.9	22.7	21.8	22.0	24.1

Source: *Demographic Yearbook 1948* (United Nations: New York, 1949), pp. 262–263.

⁴⁸ In his final parliamentary speech on the Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families, D. Saradzhev referred to the research prognoses of several statisticians without, however, mentioning their names.

In contrast to Zagorov, but also to former Prime Minister Aleksandŭr Tsankov,⁵¹ Gabrovski saw the solution to the growing pronatalist crisis in the increase of birth numbers inside wedlock—a position which he further developed in his parliamentary speech in defense of the Bill in February 1943. Though mortality and birth rates had both gone down in the last two decades, the birth rate decline was far higher. Hence, all governmental efforts had to be channeled towards a “reduction of fertility decrease.”⁵² State concerns about mortality rates had to come second—once the birth problem was settled. “Currently, when we have to settle our priorities, we should raise the issue of birth encouragement first.”⁵³ The most suitable

Average number of marriages per 1000 marriage eligible (single, widowed, divorced) males in the age group 15–60

- ⁵⁰ The thesis of family decline was best represented in the writings of the nineteenth-century French sociologists Auguste Comte, Frederic Le Play, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Emile Durkheim. This was a critique of the increasing state intervention into family life, as its adherents believed that the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution had caused a separation of the home and work spheres, weakening the family bonds between generations but also reducing the fertility rates and rendering the family unstable. For further details, see Anne Hélène Gauthier, *The State and the Family: A Comparative Analysis of Family Policies in Industrialised Countries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 22–23.
- ⁵¹ See the speech of Aleksandŭr Tsankov, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 44 M* (24 February 1943), pp. 943–945.
- ⁵² Petŭr Gabrovski, in *Borbata za Pokoleniia. Dve Parlamentarni Rechi po Zakona za Mnogodetnite semeistva* [Fighting for offspring: Two parliamentary speeches on the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families] (Sofia: Izdanie na Sŭiza na mnogodetnite semeistva, 1943), p. 12.
- ⁵³ Ibid.

strategy, in Gabrovski's opinion, was to boost marriage incentives, to work further on reducing infant mortality, but primarily, to adopt pronatalist legislation in favor of large families. Propaganda, too, had to serve the common goal, and the sentiment of love for children and the promotion of large, child-rich families had to be tied in with a sense of national duty. However, the law had also to ensure "the creation of racially valuable marriages, which will generate a healthy and vital offspring, endowed with the virtues of the Bulgarian race."⁵⁴

Pragmatism was part of the logic behind the law, as Gabrovski was fully aware that any instant and radical remedy to the population problem was unattainable under the current circumstances. There was a complex set of medical, paramedical, economic, and social factors in play, which affected birth rates and could not be easily resolved. Hence, it was the law's ultimate objective to cushion some of the immediate problems in this field,⁵⁵ rather than to hope to achieve an instant rise of births. Gabrovski acknowledged that the creation of a large family depended on the parents' material circumstances. He admitted that "in many cases, despite the aforementioned prerequisites, families avoid numerous offspring because of the economic dire straits with which they would be confronted."⁵⁶

The League's leader, Saradzhov, too, observed that though Bulgaria's youth were apt to embrace "holy matrimony," they were confronted with a sad and deplorable reality, which robbed them of the chance to engender large families and diverted them from the positive role model of their ancestors:

Because, alas, the latter used to live in another epoch, in an era of different economic conditions, where the provision for three, four, five, six, and more children was never problematic. OUR CURRENT YOUNG FAMILY, DESPITE its physiological capability and ITS GREAT DESIRE TO ACCEPT ITS PARENTAL DUTY IN A LARGE FAMILY, IS IN PRACTICE UNABLE to do so [*sic*].⁵⁷

⁵⁴ "On the necessity of a Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families," F. 264k, op. 1, a.e. 196, l. 34.

⁵⁵ Gabrovski, in *Fighting for Offspring*, p. 1.

⁵⁶ "On the necessity of a Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families," F. 264k, op. 1, a.e. 196, l. 36.

⁵⁷ Saradzhov, in *Fighting for Offspring*, p. 26.

The role of offspring in modern Bulgarian society had changed and placed a new type of strain and pressure upon the parents. There was a direct link between birth decline and economic constraint. In the past, children had been sent by God, and hence born each with their own luck. Their families used to have enough land, so children started to contribute to their upkeep at an early age. Their needs had been few and simple, and a humble income had been sufficient to sustain the modest needs of all family members. Whereas now, Saradzhov pointed out,

the modern child, THE CHILD OF THE MODERN BULGARIAN FAMILY, IS EXPENSIVE. To find a job for it is a costly venture. It takes time and prolongs its childhood to a relatively advanced age—and this under the conditions of considerably expanded cultural needs. AND THIS IS WHY THE FAMILIAR, HEALTHY, LARGE, *MNOGODETNI* BULGARIAN FAMILY HAS STARTED DISAPPEARING WITH THE ADVANCE OF A SMALL OR CHILDLESS ONE [*sic*].⁵⁸

The final version of Gabrovski's Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families, as presented to the attention of the National Assembly, highlighted issues entirely within the framework of pronatalist ideology. It aimed at national consolidation through social assistance, where child-rich, *mnogodetni* parents were defined as falling into the most needy categories:

If we want to provide a true Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families, then we should qualify it as social, i.e., as a LAW FOR SOCIAL SUPPORT. ... As the bill reveals, almost each of its decrees relates to the social support of various categories of Bulgarian citizens and of the child-rich, *mnogodetni* families in particular. All other problems touched upon in it have to be viewed in association with the issue of social support. This is the aim of the bill [*sic*].⁵⁹

Gabrovski restated this argument in his interview for the German newspaper *Donauezeitung* on 28 February 1943. He specified that the aggregated economic conditions of “land and bread hunger,” which the First World

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Gabrovski, in *Fighting for Offspring*, p. 11.

War had inflicted upon Bulgaria's predominantly agrarian population, had left a permanent negative effect on her large families. "This is why, amongst all numerous social issues that comprise the essence of the demographic problem, the government's attention has to be focused primarily on providing efficient social support for large, *mnogodetni* families."⁶⁰

Dragomir Padarev, secretary of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents, repeatedly called attention to the same objectives. Recalling Prime Minister Filov's parliamentary address on 12 April 1942, Padarev appealed for greater social justice and solidarity to increase support for the economically and socially weak sectors in the country:

Being economically and socially the weakest ones, parents of large families have every right to expect a protective legislation in favor of their large offspring. Although grievously burdened in life, they have kept their high conscientiousness about their race by supporting [with more children and hence more future citizens—S.B.] their nation.⁶¹

DRAFTS AND COMMENTS

The original version of the Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families contained twelve chapters, each of which tackled the Bulgarian family in terms of matrimonial provisions and birth incentives for ethnic Bulgarians, the creation of a special Fund for Large Bulgarian Families, punitive taxation on bachelors and childless families, the disinheritance of convicted persons, and inheritance taxes in favor of large, *mnogodetni* families.

In its definition of what comprised a Bulgarian family, Gabrovski's initial draft seemed both nationalistic and racially eugenic—legal support could only be provided to families in which both parents were of ethnic Bulgarian origin and whose Bulgarian descent could be traced back to the second degree at least. This, as well as information about any prohibited kinship relationship between the potential partners, needed to be adequately documented and medical confirmation of the partners' biological adequacy

⁶⁰ "Bŭlgariia uvelichava narodnata si sila" [Bulgaria increases her population power], Interview of Minister Petŭr Gabrovski for the Editorial of *Donauzeitung*, in *Narodno Zdrave* [People's health], No. 7–8 (28 February 1943), p. 2.

⁶¹ Padarev, "Predgovor" [Introduction], in *Fighting for Offspring*, p. 3.

for producing offspring had to be presented if a marriage permit was to be granted. Individuals suffering from mental or inherited physical deficiencies were considered as unfit to enter matrimony—a provision which closely followed the marriage requirements set by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church itself. The General Directorate of People's Health and the minister of the interior and people's health in person were to be held responsible for further detailed medical instructions as well as for the organization of medical institutions where examinations could be carried out. The couple could appeal to the local court if permission to marry was denied to them.

Gabrovski's initial draft contained provisions related to age and moral requirements—it was only husbands between the ages of twenty and forty, and wives between seventeen and thirty-five, who were considered suitable to be legally encouraged to raise a large family. An honest and clean background was “a must”—legal offenders were denied pronatalist protection and in addition, convicts were to forfeit their inheritance rights in favor of the Fund for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families under creation. The latter was envisaged as a branch of the General Directorate of People's Health and its objective was to deal with the issues of race, marriage, and the promotion of birth, along with eugenic healthcare and with all the financial support related to child-rich parents. The Fund was to be headed by a council responsible for charting and coordinating the activities of the institution. Its sources of income were expected to be subsidies provided by state and private enterprise, as well as a punitive bachelors' tax imposed on single men, childless widowers and male divorcees according to their age and gross income, and a family tax enforced on rich, childless couples after seven years of marriage.⁶²

Significantly, the Law did not attempt to include all ethnic and, in particular, religious groups under its provisions, but exclusively focused on the Bulgarian Christian Orthodox community. Within the specific historical context, any universal, all-embracing legal clause would have led to political complications in Bulgaria's confessionally diverse society. If applied to the entire population, the new matrimonial requirements regarding age and kinship degree would have undoubtedly interfered with the independent nuptial regulations enjoyed by the country's Muslim community. The latter had

⁶² “On the necessity of a Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families,” F. 264, op. 1, a.e. 196, pp. 35–36.

been conferred by both the Berlin Treaty of 1878 and the 1909 Law Concerning the Establishment and Administration of the Mohammedan Religious Community considerable autonomy in their internal affairs, including matrimony.⁶³ An ethnically all-inclusive, national law might have jeopardized the fragile foreign relations with Turkey and disturbed domestic peace.⁶⁴

Gabrovski's draft foresaw particular financial incentives to matrimony. Willing couples were to be exempt from all state, municipal, and church fees related to marriage permits and marriage certificates, while the fees for the church ceremony were to be covered by the Fund for Large, *Mnogo-detni* Families. Further on, young working families were to be exempt from having taxes deducted from their salaries according to the requirements of the 1935 State Budget Law, and were also entitled to the substantial sum of 50,000 levs as a marriage loan,⁶⁵ paid in coupon, to purchase a flat, furniture, or personal business investments. The application for such a loan had to be approved by the local authorities and medical services, and the couple was obliged to declare that they would observe the instructions of the General Directorate of People's Health on family hygiene and childcare. The loan was to be repaid within ten years, in two-year installments, and attracted a four per cent rate of annual interest. It was gendered in nature in disadvantaging women—loans were to be granted to husbands only, after a detailed account on the part of the applicant how he intended to make use of it in practice. The loan had to be returned on demand in case of divorce or separation, in case of criminal conviction or if the couple had failed to produce a child within a period of six years or violated the Directorate's instructions on family hygiene and childcare. The birth of each child cancelled out 25 per cent of the marriage loan, provided the pregnancy was registered in time and the couple held a medical record of the history of the pregnancy itself. Poor parents of Bulgarian origin could apply for an extra

⁶³ For further details, see R.J. Crampton, "The Turks in Bulgaria, 1878–1944," in K.H. Karpat (ed.), *The Turks of Bulgaria: The History, Culture and Political Fate of a Minority* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1990), pp. 43–78, here p. 63; Daskalov, *The Bulgarian Society*, II, pp. 37–38.

⁶⁴ After the secularization of matrimony in Turkey in 1926, the Bulgarian Muslim community gained autonomy, and nuptiality was placed under the jurisdiction of local sharia courts in Bulgaria. Despite a history of complicated relations between the Bulgarian state and its Muslim minorities, since the 9 May 1934 coup, the Muslim religious authorities had been tolerated by the Bulgarian central government as a counter to the aggressive encroachment of secular Pan-Turkism in the country.

⁶⁵ The sum equaled almost twice the average annual salary of civil servants. An income of 30,000 levs a year, however, was admitted to be insufficient to support a decent lifestyle. For further details, see below.

sum of 30,000 lev support in cash to meet the immediate necessities of a child's birth. In addition, newly-wed men were exempt from compulsory labor service for that particular year.

While marriage and children were intensively promoted, heavy punitive measures were foreseen for what was viewed as "old" bachelordom. It was proposed that single men over the age of twenty-seven would be sacked from state, municipal and publicly paid positions, while other single, widowed, and divorced male state employees would be dismissed within a period of eighteen months after the Bill was passed in the National Assembly. Exceptions could only be granted to long-term employees over the age of fifty. A penalty tax was to be calculated on a sliding scale with regard to age and annual income, and fixed to 3/360, 5/360, 7/360, 9/360, 13/360, and 20/360 at an annual income up to 24,000, 48,000, 84,000, 120,000, 180,000, and over 180,001 levs, respectively. These figures were further amplified by fifty per cent for unwed men between the age of thirty-six and forty-five, and by 100 per cent for single males over the age of forty-five. Bachelors were the first to be summoned to annual labor conscription, while those opting to pay for exemption had the amount doubled. The provisions exclusively targeted men; female employees who had earlier been subject to penalty taxation according to the State Budget Law from 1935 were to be exempt from it.

Restrictions and financial burdens were proposed for childless families, too. If no child was born within the first six years after marriage and the annual family income exceeded the preposterous (for its time) sum of 70,000 levs, a rising fine was to be deducted (starting from three to five per cent between 70,001 and 90,000 levs, and rising to twenty-five per cent at a 130,000 lev annual income).

By contrast, the initial draft of the Law foresaw various incentives for large Bulgarian families. To fall into the category of the child-rich, the couple had to raise a minimum of four live children, and no differentiation was made between adopted children, and children born within a previous or current marriage.

Just as the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents had campaigned for earlier, the bill granted large Bulgarian families privileges in renting land and land distribution, in agricultural credit and in price reductions for agricultural equipment. Members of large families were privileged applicants for a state, municipal, or public position, and were to be preferen-

tially selected if unemployed. A monthly 100 lev cash support was to be provided for children of poor families, starting with the fourth one and until the age of five. Fathers of large families were exempt from labor conscription and were to be summoned last in case of war mobilization. Mothers of large families, too, were to be awarded a special honorary medal by the state—bronze, silver, or gold for four, five to six, or seven plus children, respectively. They and their children were entitled to special rights in health centers and spas, in public queues, and to substantial reductions in their transport fares. Children of large families were to be favored for admission to nurseries, schools, holiday resorts, hospitals, or sanatoriums, and their school fees were reduced by 50–75 per cent or scrapped altogether, depending on their number.

The initial draft envisaged a special Department for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families under the supervision of the General Directorate of People's Health. A Council for Large Bulgarian Families was to be established within the Department, with the ultimate objective to chart the general annual plans for activities and advise on the Fund's budget. Its members were to be the Minister of the Interior and his secretary, the Director of People's Health, the head of the Statistical Office, and a representative of the Holy Synod, of the Ministry of People's Education, of the Ministry of Finance, and of the Ministry of War, together with the heads of the Departments of Physiology and of Biology at Sofia University. They were also to be joined by representatives of the civil sector, i.e., the youth organization Defender, the Union of Bulgarian Peasants, the Bulgarian Workers' Union, the national Union for Child Protection, the Bulgarian Women's Union, and the League of Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families. Around five extra experts appointed by the minister of the interior and people's health completed the Council. The views of the member-organizations were independent of the Supreme Medical Council, and the minister of the interior could freely choose between their individual standpoints.

OFFICIAL ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

The final Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families reflected most of the draft's provisions, though some points were altered or enhanced, while others were omitted. According to documents found alongside, Gabrovski had

sent out the draft for comments and approval to the Ministry of Justice, to the Ministry of Finance, to the Ministry of Railways, to the Holy Synod, as well as to the Association of Bulgarian Solicitors. It was their comments which Gabrovski took partly into consideration. Yet his revisions were few and, if compared with the numerous suggestions or protests he received, they reveal that Gabrovski was decisive in carrying out his vision of the Bill and that as well, he was in a strong political position to do so.

The Holy Synod of the Bulgarian autocephalous Church was the institution which most fervently objected to all provisions regarding the regulation of marriage. Even by 1945 Bulgaria had failed to introduce civil marriage registration, and the matrimonial affairs of the Orthodox population had been left entirely in the hands of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Following the provisions of the Berlin Congress Peace Treaty of 1878, the state of marriage and divorce of all other religious minorities fell under the jurisdiction of their corresponding religious authorities, combined, in theory, with state control.⁶⁶ In practice, however, the Bulgarian state found the situation to be largely unsatisfactory and, ever since the early 1920s, attempts had been made to place matrimony under direct state supervision. In 1925, a new Attorney Law admitted civil advocates to defend their clients over divorce issues in the Orthodox ecclesiastical courts, while in March 1936, Dimitŭr Peshev, then Minister of Justice, submitted a civil marriage bill to the Codification Commission of the National Assembly.⁶⁷ Although Peshev did not succeed in this, the idea of secularizing the institution of marriage continued to preoccupy the discourse of solicitors throughout the period of 1937–1938, and it re-entered media debates in 1941.⁶⁸

In its session on 13 November 1942, the Holy Synod, as represented by its highly popular vice-chairman, Metropolitan Neofit Vidinski, diplomatically expressed its appreciation for the new pronatalist bill. Concurrently, it also energetically protested against any secularizing shift from priests to mayors in the issuing of marriage certificates, and objected to the abolition

⁶⁶ Crampton, "The Turks in Bulgaria, 1878–1944," p. 65.

⁶⁷ Stefan Tsankov, *Bŭlgarskata Pravoslavna Tsŭrkva ot Osvobozhdenieto do Nastoiashteto* [The Bulgarian Orthodox Church from the liberation to the present day], (Sofia: Sofiiski Universitet, Bogoslovski Fakultet, 1938–1939), XVI, pp. 242–243. See also Daniela Kalkandzhieva's, *Bŭlgarskata Pravoslavna Tsŭrkva i Dŭrzhavta, 1944–1953* [The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the state 1944–1953] (Albatros, 1997), p. 98, referring to Peshev's legislative initiative.

⁶⁸ See *Utro* [Morning] and *Zaria* [Dawn] from 7 March 1941, in F. 242, op. 4, a.e. 353.

of marriage taxes paid by the laity to their local clergy. This interference in the financial affairs of the Orthodox Church was interpreted as threatening the integrity, social position, and independence of the Church and as yet another governmental attempt to promote social secularization.⁶⁹ The planned Fund for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families would usurp the 130 million levs expected as a direct Church income.⁷⁰ Given that the Large, *Mnogodetni* Fund was to be controlled by the General Directorate of People's Health, i.e., a structure within the Ministry of the Interior and People's Health, the financial subjugation of the Church would also entail a direct supervision by the state over ecclesiastical affairs. That the Bill could serve such functions was also evident from the continuing State-Church conflict over the Patriarchal elections from 1942–1943, which Filov defined as an attempt by the Holy Synod “to transform the Church into a state within the state,” especially when it was headed by a strong and powerful Patriarch.⁷¹

To counter the threat, the Holy Synod repeatedly emphasized the role which the Orthodox Church had traditionally played in the people's life. It was a people's Church in its essence, to the Bulgarian *Volk* both “a mother and a saint,” who had always been there for it both in times of joy and grief. To exempt people from paying their financial tribute to the Church would sever the intimate link between Church and *Volk*, and pave the way to their

⁶⁹ All throughout its history after the Bulgarian Liberation, the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church claimed to have been suffering from state attempts to humiliate and denigrate its authority when it was reduced to accepting the 45–50 million “crumbs” of the state budget—totally insufficient to support its activities. In the mid-1930s, the Church was already facing the dilemma whether to give in completely to the state by surrendering to the latter her financial and economic affairs, or to “climb the thorny road of financial independence, leading to the high summits of well-doing, creativity and perfection.” Fearing that the first choice would rob her of her autonomy by rendering her materially powerless and thus placing her under total state subordination, the Church went for a fight with the state over the right on the monopoly over certain taxes, burial accessories, land and other immovable property. Eventually she managed to secure, “for the first time, 59 years after the Liberation,” her rights on the production of wax candles for private and public religious services. This, in the words of Al. Zhekov, director of the Church Financial Department at the Holy Synod, was particularly thanks to K. Gunev, Minister of Finance (1935–1938), who “eventually managed to understand that this Church, which had created the Bulgarian state, needed support.” Gabrovski and his colleagues, however, did not seem to share Gunev's views and approach. For a more detailed account of the financial issues of the Bulgarian Church, see Al. Zhekov, “Finansovo ustroistvo na bulgarskata pravoslavna tsürkva” [The financial organization of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church], *Publichna Ochetnost* [Public accounts], I (1 January 1937), pp. 20–23.

⁷⁰ F. 264, op. 1, a.e. 196, l. 43.

⁷¹ Filov, *Diary*, pp. 569–572. In Filov's opinion, the vote for the new Patriarchal elections ought to be carried out by a representative body of the laity rather than by a close circle which was in charge of the elections of both the bishops and the Patriarch—the old practice codified in the Exarchate Statute before the Liberation.

total estrangement. By no means could the Bulgarian Orthodox Church agree to let this happen.⁷²

Heated disagreement arose also over the discrepancies in the minimal age of marriage as set by the Bill (seventeen years for women and twenty years for men) and by the Church (sixteen for women and eighteen for men). The state's proposed higher age of matrimony may be interpreted as another effort by the state to promote modernization in the field of Bulgarian nuptial practices and reduce the incidence of what was starting to be perceived as "child marriages." At the same time, it can also be understood as a positive eugenic act, i.e., an attempt to "equip" the race with biologically mature parents, able to produce healthy offspring. In contrast to the state's vision, the Church stood in defense of traditional marriage rites, highlighting the realities of Bulgarian everyday life. Everyday experience had convinced church authorities to compromise on matrimonial rules and occasionally bless marriages of fifteen-year-old women and seventeen-year-old men (orphans, in particular)—this, on the grounds of "preserving the moral stronghold of the Bulgarian family and avoiding illegitimate cohabitations, which otherwise would occur."⁷³

Another issue of strong controversy was the proposed redefinition of prohibited degrees of kinship between potential spouses. The Bill foresaw reducing the range of marriage restrictions between kin, which the Church saw as increasing the risk of incest. The Holy Synod stressed that both canon law and Bulgarian customs placed a ban on "blood" marriages up to the fifth degree, and marriages between collaterally and spiritually related partners were prohibited up to the fourth and second degree respectively. Two brothers could not marry two sisters, while godparents could not marry the parents of their godchildren.⁷⁴ As the Bill excluded marriages only up to the third degree, it was feared that it could jeopardize the physical and moral strength of the Bulgarian family.⁷⁵ Worse, the Holy Synod complained that

if such confusion in kinship is codified, it will, as afore mentioned, bring great calamities in our religious and *Volk* traditions and family perceptions, and

⁷² F. 264, op. 1, a.e. 196, l. 43.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 40.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

will definitely denigrate holy matrimonial relations in the eyes of our people. Large, *mnogodetni* families are founded on healthy moral and religious views. If the latter are shaken, the people's perceptions of family and children will be shaken, too.⁷⁶

The Church argued that present matrimony rules did not inhibit people from marriage, nor could they be held responsible for the decline in the birth rate.⁷⁷ Hence, "in no way will the Holy Synod betray the canon laws and the Exarchate Statute in regard to prohibited kinship degrees for marriages."⁷⁸ On the contrary, the Church interpreted the slump in marriage and procreation as a moral problem, which the Bill had failed to tackle. In the Church's view, the Bill avoided enforcing punitive measures against the spread of illegitimate cohabitation among the wealthy social strata—which "ruins rightful cohabitation in matrimony and is a key barrier to the creation of healthy, large families." In addition, the Bill kept silent about the rising frequency of abortions, nor did it suggest any legal sanctions against "this evil."⁷⁹

However, letters of complaint sent by citizens to the minister of the interior and to the minister of justice reveal that the rigid Church regulations could in truth obstruct marriage and remarriage. Relationships between in-laws and between godparents and godchildren, treated by the Church as part of the marriage taboo, did result in illegal cohabitations and children outside wedlock.⁸⁰

Furthermore, the Holy Synod attacked the provisions for a premarital medical examination—an argument which had continued for the last twenty years. It justified its misgivings by referring to the harsh Bulgarian reality: doctors were scarce in the countryside and a premarital medical certificate would be virtually unattainable in remote places. Instead, the Church recommended sticking to its old practice, which required couples to testify in writing that none of the partners suffered from bodily or mental deficiencies that could obstruct their matrimonial union.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., l. 106; F. 242, op. 4, a.e. 353, ll. 2–4, 18.

⁸¹ F. 264, op. 1, a.e. 196, l. 42.

Objections were expressed against the attempt to treat monks and widowed priests as singles, and tax them in favor of the Child-Rich, *Mnogodetni* Fund. According to the Canon Law, clericals either were ordered to observe celibacy or were forbidden to remarry, and the Holy Synod insisted that they were exempt from paying a bachelors' tax.

The Ministry of Justice and the Association of Bulgarian Solicitors upheld some of the arguments of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. They supported the Church's claims regarding kinship degrees and age of matrimony,⁸² as "they did not pay tribute to Bulgarian customs."⁸³ If required at all, they had to be carried out by "the Exarchate Statute, otherwise they would lead to an unjustified mess in those [matrimonial] regulations."⁸⁴ The provisions to disinherit convicted criminals in favor of a future Child-Rich, *Mnogodetni* Fund were contested on both legal and humane grounds. They were considered an unreasoned decision as they could easily upset the total body of property legislation,⁸⁵ and in addition, would constitute unfair treatment of the children of convicts, by penalizing them for their parents' misdemeanor.⁸⁶ Similarly, convicted criminals, on marrying, were not be deprived of the opportunity to apply for marriage loans, as they could be used to rehabilitate them in their subsequent life. There was no evidence that criminal inclinations could be inherited or passed down to offspring, "the more so that the very assumption of *delinquente nato* [inborn delinquency—S.B.] has already been questioned."⁸⁷

The matter of racial purity provoked further concern and reflected the unease which Bulgarian politicians and Bulgarian society in general felt about the imposed anti-Semitic legislation and about racial discrimination in a generally religiously tolerant society.⁸⁸ According to the Association of Bulgarian Solicitors, article 3 of the Bill, which defined "Bulgarian-ness" by

⁸² Ibid., l.l. 46, 62.

⁸³ Ibid., l. 46.

⁸⁴ Ibid., l. 63.

⁸⁵ Ibid., l. 64.

⁸⁶ Ibid., ll. 47–48.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁸ According to Prime Minister Filov, King Boris had suggested to include the labor-fit Jewish population in special labor groups and thus avoid their deportation to Poland. He had sympathized with the Orthodox Church, which insisted on excluding christened Jews from the sanctions of the anti-Semitic laws and thus diverting the Jewish issue from a racial to a religious basis. See Filov, *Diary*, pp. 568–569, as well as *ibid.*, footnote 14 (10 January–29 December 1943), pp. 793–794.

at least two ascending relatives of Bulgarian origin, had to be amended in a way to include the offspring of mixed marriages and with a Bulgarian father as eligible for the pronatalist benefits. In their words, “this would give these future Bulgarian citizens the opportunity to identify as Bulgarians from an early age.”⁸⁹

The King, too, seemed deeply dissatisfied with the rigidity of who was supposed to be of “pure Bulgarian origin,” and, according to Filov, had returned the Bill to Gabrovski for reconsideration. His anger stemmed from the fact that the Bulgarian Royal Family themselves and especially Crown-prince Simeon (Italian-German by parental origin), i.e., next in line, “failed to meet its requirements.”⁹⁰

Significantly, the Solicitors’ Association redefined the Bill’s vision of what constituted a large, *mnogodetni* family, by reducing the number of children to three instead of four. In its view, “three children are sufficient to determine a large family. To the best of our knowledge, this is the case in foreign legislations. Giving birth to and nurturing four children is a hard demand these days.”⁹¹ Mothers of three children were to be included in the list of the privileged, while monthly benefits for poor large families needed to be raised from 100 to 300 leva per child as “nowadays a 100-lev support is inefficient. To justify this money as support and make it work at all, it should be increased.”⁹² The Solicitors’ Association recommended delegating assistance for large families directly to the state and drawing the required funds from the state budget. The establishment of a special council to supervise large Bulgarian families was judged as an unnecessary, resource-consuming enterprise.

The Ministry of Justice, too, expressed anxiety about a possible budget overshoot and suggested that marriage loans and family allowances should be confined to the poor and needy alone.⁹³ Furthermore, it advocated a more relaxed, liberal attitude towards single male state officials, widowers and childless couples. Men were not to be penalized with a bachelors’ tax straight after their wives’ deaths, nor were they to be blamed for

⁸⁹ F. 264, op.1, a.e. 196, l. 63.

⁹⁰ Filov, *Diary*, p. 544.

⁹¹ F. 264, op.1, a.e. 196, l. 64.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., l. 46.

being unable to beget children. Requirements concerning the marital status of state employees were welcome, but age restrictions had to take under account the length of university education and be extended to thirty.

The State Budget and Accountancy Directorate, an administrative unit of the Ministry of Finance, brought up practical issues about the timeliness of the Bill. It feared that paying out marriage loans in coupons, rather than in cash, would discourage savings and, instead, raise the consumption tendencies to a level incompatible with the severely restricted industrial output. This in turn would increase inflation. In addition, the financial privileges for the child-rich would hit the budget of the central and local governments, and jeopardize the income of the Bulgarian State Railways. Furthermore, the policy of exempting newly-wed couples of state officials alone from the 1935 punitive tax could provoke legitimate discontent among the underprivileged rest.⁹⁴ The State Budget and Accountancy Directorate approved of the state's initiative to alleviate the social problems inflicted on the population by the war, and agreed that the Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families was justified from a social welfare point of view. Yet, in order to achieve the expected results, substantial means would be required, and these were scarce:

The question arises whether the bill can qualify as timely under the current extreme war circumstances. Undeniably, these circumstances are the source of the social ailments which the Bill aims to eradicate. Yet, it indirectly touches upon a number of other social and economic phenomena, whose solution requires better times.⁹⁵

Gabrovski took little notice of the Directorate's considerations and the financial provisions for large families were codified into law. Yet, five months after the final Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families was enacted, Dobri Bozhilov, Minister of Finance (November 1938–September 1943), was forced to admit that the available resources to meet the considerable pronatalist demands were inadequate. Nevertheless, he expressed hopes that “although these financial means are insufficient for the grand tasks of

⁹⁴ Ibid., l. 54.

⁹⁵ Ibid., l. 54.

this Fund, they will nevertheless contribute to mapping its foundations, so that part of its activities can be realized this year.”⁹⁶ The breakdown of the resources reveal that 99 per cent of the revenue of the 106 million lev budget of the Large Families Fund was assembled from a local, 10 per cent land tax (50,350,000 levs), from the 5 per cent punitive tax imposed on state-employed couples (25 million levs), from increase in income taxation (20 million levs) and finally, from a 2 per cent tax, according to the 1943 Land-income-tax and Building-tax Decree-Law, amounting to 10 million levs.⁹⁷ Out of the 106 million levs, 42 million levs (39.6 per cent) were spent on marriage loan bonuses in the range of 30,000 levs,⁹⁸ while 22,310,000 levs (nearly 21 per cent) were utilized for monthly family benefits for the more humble amount of 300 levs,⁹⁹ payable to large families with four and more children aged up to five. Surprisingly, the considerable sum of 36 million levs (34 per cent of the budget) was set aside for pronatalist propaganda measures, such as medals of honor, celebrations of large families, and competition awards.¹⁰⁰

THE FINAL VERSION

The original draft of the Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian families, as preserved in the archive file of the Ministry of the Interior and for People's Health, contains a number of handwritten remarks by either Gabrovski or his officials, which allows a reconstruction of the process of amendments which took place before the submission of the Bill to parliamentary debate. Although the definition of a large family as composed of a minimum of four children was maintained, its scope was nevertheless broadened by permitting families with three live children to enjoy identical privileges as families

⁹⁶ “Motivi kŭm zakonoproekta za biudzheta na fonda ‘Za mnogodetnite bŭlgarski semeistva’ pri glavната direkt-sia za narodnoto zdrave za 1943 biudzhetana godina” [Preamble of the Bill for a Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Family Fund for the 1943 budget year], *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, V ES, 2 M* (21 July 1943), pp. 30–31.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁹⁸ According to statements during the parliamentary debates on the Law for *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families, 30,000 levs was approximately the annual income of the majority of state officials in 1943. For further details, see *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), p. 951.

⁹⁹ According to the statement of MP Dimitŭr Andreev, at the beginning of 1943 the price of a loaf of white bread had increased to 150 levs, while a kilogram of sugar cost 200 levs and a piece of butter 700 levs. See the speech of Dimitŭr Andreev, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), p. 951.

¹⁰⁰ “Preamble of the Bill for a Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Family Fund, p. 31.

with four live-born.¹⁰¹ Adopted, legitimized, and step-children were recognized as family children,¹⁰² while children in general were defined as marital offspring up to the age of twenty-one.¹⁰³ The age limit was later dropped and a definition of children as “single, living with their parents and dependent on them” was added to the finally-voted version.¹⁰⁴ No reference, however, was made to children born outside marriage.

At the same time, the number of large families eligible to receive free medical treatment and partial or full exemption from school taxes was questioned—“Does it equally hold for both the poor and the rich!”¹⁰⁵—and well-off families with an annual income of 300,000 leva or over were excluded from this privilege.¹⁰⁶ Yet no income requirements were set up for one’s entitlement to a marriage loan.¹⁰⁷

Regarding age of marriage with respect to the couple’s eligibility for marriage loans, a concession was made in favor of the Holy Synod, and the lower age threshold was left unspecified.¹⁰⁸ Punitive inheritance measures in favor of the Fund for Large Families were cancelled under the pressure of the Ministry of Justice and the Solicitors’ Association,¹⁰⁹ and the very idea of dismissing single state employees was eventually repealed. Similarly, the range of men liable to bachelors’ taxation was limited to singles and to childless widowers and divorcees, provided they did not enter matrimony within the next three years.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the decision to enforce a tax on single men was a constant theme throughout the Bill and led to heated parliamentary discussions. Eventually, monks and widowed priests were exempt from paying a bachelors’ tax.¹¹¹

The plan to establish a new administrative structure, allowing state intervention in matrimonial regulations was upheld and a Department for Large

¹⁰¹ F. 264, op.1, a.e. 196, p. 15.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Zakonite za Narodn Zaem, Mnogodetni Bulgarski Semeistva. Motivite i Pülen Tekst* [The Laws for the People’s Loan and for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families: Preambles and full text], (Sofia, 1943), p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ F. 264, op.1, a.e. 196, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 44 M* (24 February 1943), p. 936; *The Laws for the People’s Loan and for Large, Mnogodetni Bulgarian Families*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁷ F. 264, op.1, a.e. 196, l. 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 44 M* (24 February 1943), p. 935.

¹⁰⁹ F. 264, op.1, a.e. 196, ll. 8–9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., l. 5.

¹¹¹ *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 44 M* (24 February 1943), p. 937.

Families, with a Council attached to it, was included in the Bill's provisions. So was the partial financial subordination of the Church to the General Directorate of People's Health, as poor couples were exempt from paying for their marriage certificates. A later Bill for the 1943 Budget of the Large Families Fund, specified a 2 million-lev sum to compensate the Church for its financial losses. However, the amount was substantially smaller than the 130 million-lev sum demanded by the Holy Synod.¹¹²

3. The bachelors' tax controversy

On 4 December 1942 the Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families was published in the daily newspaper *Morning* under the title "Law for Encouraging Marriages and Birth Rates, A Project,"¹¹³ in anticipation of the public's comments. Part of the published Bill, namely that dealing with the introduction of a bachelors' tax, differed from the authentic Bill and stirred up both the reading audience and the national deputies.

Why a "fake" copy of the eventual Bill was presented to the public is hard to explain, and the act even baffled the national deputies.¹¹⁴ By no means, however, was it an accidental act and it might have served as a test of the public's readiness to tolerate an additional tax burden. This was certainly Prof. Aleksandŭr Tsankov's opinion, who viewed the very idea of a bachelors' tax as just another fiscal act to be imposed upon the citizens in order "to boost Bulgaria's finances."¹¹⁵

The Bill announced in the media, put rigid employment limitations on single men above the age of twenty-seven or thirty (corresponding to their holding a high-school or university degree). The restrictions were to be implemented both in the state and in the private sector, where bachelors above the specified age limit, were to be sacked from their administrative position, and banned from practicing in the field of commerce, industry, or the so-called "free professions." The only exceptions were singles in full-time employment,

¹¹² *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, VI RS*, (21 July 1943), p. 31.

¹¹³ "Zakon za Nasŭrchavane Brakovete i Razhdaemsotta, Proekt" [Law for Encouraging Marriages and Birth Rates, A Project], *Morning*, No. 9999 (4 December 1942), p. 7.

¹¹⁴ See speech of Aleksandŭr Tsankov, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS*, 44 M (24 February 1943), p. 945.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the latter being granted a grace period of eighteen months to marry and settle down. The restrictions did not apply to men over fifty, as well as officers, sailors, clerics, and men medically certified as unfit to rear a healthy offspring, and those supporting a sister of marital age or siblings in education.¹¹⁶ All single men, childless widowers, and childless divorcees included, were liable to a bachelors' tax, imposed on their gross income as follows:

Table 6.1. Bachelor penalty taxation as foreseen in the Law for Encouraging Marriages and Birth Rates, A Project¹¹⁷

Gross annual income in levs	Bachelors' tax
Up to 24,000	5/360
Up to 48,000	7/360
Up to 84,000	10/360
Up to 120,000	15/360
Over 120,000	20/360

The tax was to be increased by 50 per cent for bachelors in the age range of 36–45, and by 100 per cent for those over 45.

The figures given in the Bill and presented to the attention of the national deputies two months later, however, differed from those released to the media and were additionally aggregated:

Table 6.2. Bachelor penalty tax as foreseen in the Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families¹¹⁸

Gross monthly income in levs	Bachelors' tax
Up to 2,500	10%
From 2,501 up to 4,000	12%
From 4,001 up to 6,000	14%
From 6,001 up to 8,000	16%
From 8,001 up to 11,000	18%
From 11,001 up to 15,000	20%
From 15,001 up to 20,000	22%
Over 20,000	25%

¹¹⁶ *Morning*, No. 9999, (4 December 1942), p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Law for Encouraging Marriages and Birth Rates, A Project, *Morning*, No. 9999, 4 December 1942, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Source: Table in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA*, IV RS, 44 M (24 February 1943), p. 937.

Given that the average monthly income of 216,000 state officials was stated not to exceed the “humble amount of 3,000 levs” and the daily wage of 76,000 workers in Sofia was about or under 70 levs,¹¹⁹ the burden of the envisaged bachelors’ tax might have hit worst the lower-income layers of Bulgarian society. A monthly salary of 7,000 up to 9,000 levs was regarded by the national deputies as a “rather large sum of money,” which only few state employees could enjoy as monthly income.¹²⁰

The public response to the envisaged bachelor provisions was in general one of aggrieved surprise and the Ministry of the Interior and People’s Health scrupulously collected their comments. Most of the readers’ observations showed little favor to the attempted legal innovations and revealed that Gabrovski’s Bill for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families was touching a raw nerve, especially with men. These comments exposed numerous problems in the everyday and legal life of Bulgarian families, which called for additional attention and solution.

Essentially, the idea of introducing bachelors’ taxation was met with “mixed feelings.”¹²¹ Mincho Stefanov from the town of Sliven suggested extending taxation to childless female divorcees, too, unless they had entered a second matrimony within three years. In addition, they ought to be deprived of their ex-husband’s support. His reasoning was not pronatalist but pragmatic—as a divorcee himself, he had remarried and his poor income made the support of his current family and of his ex-wife impossible.¹²² Sixty-year-old Anto Iordanov from the village of Gorni Lom, Belogradchik, congratulated Gabrovski upon his legislative initiative and called him a man “precious for the nation.”¹²³ Yet, in his opinion, fathers of large families, too, had to be granted privileges. As a widower, he claimed to have shared all household chores and family duties with his late wife. Being a father of seven and a grandfather of twelve, he hoped to enjoy a free railway ride [as the law would allow mothers of large families to do], as he yearned “to see our capital at least once a year in accordance with this Bill.”¹²⁴ Similarly, A.B. from the vil-

¹¹⁹ See speech of Dimitŭr Andreev, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), p. 951.

¹²⁰ See speech of Danail Zhechev, *Ibid.*, p. 947.

¹²¹ See speech of Aleksandŭr Tsankov, *Ibid.*, p. 945.

¹²² F. 264k, op. 1, a.e. 196, l. 83.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, l. 85.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 85.

lage of Godech referred to the Bill as “one of the best ones so far,” and insisted on railway privileges for the [male] head of a child-rich household.¹²⁵

However, single, sixty-year old officer Petrovski complained that if the Bill were enacted, he might lose his job. As a war veteran he had fulfilled his national duties and had been wounded twice—a fact which had deprived him of the chance to marry and raise a family. Petrovski suggested that single or childless disabled war veteran and holders of the Bravery medal should be spared the sack.¹²⁶ Penka and Todor Sirakov, two teachers married to each other from the village of Pordim, directed their plea both to the minister of the interior and to the prime minister himself. They were childless contrary to their own will and wish. The legal regulations exempting married state employees with children from the bachelors' tax left them hurt and humiliated. They appealed to have the bachelors' tax scrapped.¹²⁷ Ivan A., a state official from the “newly liberated” Aegean region, too, found fault with the idea of the bachelors' tax. In his words, single men in the Aegean districts had few chances to marry, as there were simply no Bulgarian girls there. In the towns of Siar, Kavala, Drama, and Xanti, one could hardly meet “ten single ladies per one hundred bachelors.” However, Bulgarian men were not allowed to marry Greek women. Ivan A. appealed to the minister of the interior and people's health to introduce an additional article in the Bill, according to which single Bulgarian officials from the Aegean region were granted three extra one-month holidays. Thus, they could return to their native places and search for a proper Bulgarian bride.¹²⁸

Boris Ivanov qualified the Bill as “timely” but asked for certain relaxations in the otherwise highly restrictive Church attitude towards divorce. In his opinion, if childlessness was recognized as a factor for divorce or the three-year period of spousal separation (required to grant divorce) was shortened, a man could more easily re-marry and create numerous offspring.¹²⁹ An anonymous male writer, however, complained that the Bill had failed to analyze the social motives behind men's enforced celibacy in “these extraordinarily difficult times.” Such were the rocketing rents and food prices in

¹²⁵ Ibid., l. 12.

¹²⁶ Ibid., l. 95.

¹²⁷ Ibid., l. 38.

¹²⁸ Ibid., l. 96.

¹²⁹ Ibid., l. 106.

urban areas, the absence of elementary living conditions for young couples, plus the numerous family dependents that “spinsters” and “old bachelors” had to take care of.¹³⁰ Most of all, however, the Bill had failed to provide instructions on how modern women could be forced into marriage at all. Contemporary women had channeled their attention away from the home and instead to the streets, bars, and cafés. Instead of devoting themselves to their family and household, they dedicated themselves to make-up and smoking. Unlike the German and the Italian family legislations, which had returned women to the kitchen and to their children, and thus had redirected their interests from cabarets to charity organizations, the Bulgarian law was attempting to enforce compulsory marriages on men. Instead of correcting women’s behavior according to the traditions of the good old times, it simply demoralized the most patriotically-minded, as its true motives were no more than the introduction of new taxation burdens upon the citizens.¹³¹

An interesting overview of its readers’ comments on the Bill was provided by the newspaper *Dawn* on 13 December 1942.¹³² Similarly as in earlier comments on the State Budget and Accountancy Directorate, it questioned the pronatalist measures as altogether untimely and unnecessary—noting that none of the readers had ever referred to them. Instead, most feedbacks had stressed the dismal living conditions of the population, especially related to food and clothes supply. The reading audience had complained that the state seemed quite indifferent to their children, although the latter were an issue of national duty and national self-preservation. Urban living conditions did not encourage young people to enter matrimony, and the whole issue of marriage could hardly be solved within eighteen months. Marriage required love and a suitable choice of spouse, while the law kept quiet about human sentiments.

On an expert level, the Bill for Encouraging Marriages and Birth Rates met with criticism, too. Dr Vera Zlatareva, a prominent solicitor and left-wing BANU activist,¹³³ too, supported the need for a law in support of large Bulgarian families. However, she doubted whether pronatalist issues had to

¹³⁰ Ibid., l. 103.

¹³¹ Ibid., l. 104.

¹³² Ibid., l. 107.

¹³³ Vera Zlatareva (1905–1977), distinguished social researcher and campaigner for women’s legal rights in Bulgaria, including female solicitors’ rights to practice in courts. Graduate of the Faculty Law of Sofia University

be combined with marriage and age-of-marriage reforms. In her view, this would aggravate the already over-complex Bulgarian matrimonial legislation and would force young couples to join other Churches, thus betraying their Eastern Orthodox faith for administrative reasons.¹³⁴ In contrast to most readers' complaints, she approved of the state's attitude towards "old" bachelordom. In her view marriage was an expression of human reproduction instinct, channeled within the bounds of legal matrimony. Late marriages were clearly "anti-natural"—"the healthy, normal thing for everybody to do is to get married and have children in good time."¹³⁵ However, the fact that marriages and births needed legal encouragement was disconcerting, indicating that the social attitude towards the institutions of marriage and procreation was set on the wrong foundations. Zlatareva identified increasing material hardship, poor health and/or private reasons as the key obstacles stopping young people from entering marriage and raising a family. There was an obvious danger that high penalty taxes could generate "fake marriages" and create "miserable parents and unhappy children."¹³⁶

The article of Dr Angel Penchev (director of the Neuro-psychiatric University Clinic), "Racial-biological problems of the new European state," published on 25 February 1943,¹³⁷ i.e., when the Bill was being debated in the Parliament, exclusively focused on how to induce men to undertake wedlock. A modern state needed to "resort to forceful measures in order to ensure normal population growth" and hence it was in the state's right and competence to restrict the personal liberties of bachelors and make them serve their

and holder of a PhD degree (1931); in the period of 1931–1934, assistant to the legal advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture, representative of the Ministry of Agriculture at the High Administrative Court, participant in governmental commissions on legal drafting, chairwoman of the "Social vice" section at the Police Department, fighting prostitution. Together with her husband, Mikhail Genovski, himself a well-known lawyer and politician, Zlatareva was an activist of the BANU, working in close cooperation with the communists. She was secretary to the women's lawyers section of the Bulgarian Association of University Women (affiliated to the International Federation of University Women), and long-term president of the Bulgarian Independent Temperance Union. Zlatareva was Bulgaria's first woman-lawyer to be granted the right to practice in court (but only after the communist takeover in 1944). For further details, see Krassimira Daskalova, "Vera Zlatareva," in Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loufti (eds.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries* (CEU Press, Budapest—New York: 2006), pp. 620–622.

¹³⁴ Dr Vera Zlatareva, "Pokrovitelstvo na mnogodetnite semeistva" [Support of large, *mnogodetni* families], *Advokatski Pregled* [Solicitors' review], No. 9 (1 January 1942), pp. 105–107.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹³⁷ Angel Penchev, *Zora* [Dawn], No. 7099 (25 February 1943), p. 2.

country. Nevertheless, in Bulgaria's case he did not see any real-life justification for this penalty. If all bachelors had been forced into marriage in 1934, Penchev pointed out, Bulgaria's population growth would have increased by just 4,200 children, i.e., 0.7 per thousand of the population. As circa 75 per cent of the population was engaged in agriculture and tilling their own land, attempts to dismiss officials from employment would be pointless, as it would be inapplicable to the majority of single male peasants. Similarly, the state would find it impossible to collect bachelors' taxes, as legally, agricultural property belonged to the [married] head of the family, and unmarried sons owned nothing.¹³⁸ He also disputed from a medical and biological point of view whether marriages should be enforced on a certain percent of the male population, as, in his words, the majority of singles tended towards abnormal behavior or were suffering from mental disease.¹³⁹

The parliamentary deputies, too, showed lukewarm enthusiasm about the envisaged bachelors' tax. Apart from Saradzhov, who hailed the Bill in his parliamentary speech on 24 February 1943, and Prof. Tsankov's general dissatisfaction with Bulgaria's direction towards pronatalist policy, the rest of the national deputies devoted all their consideration and debates to the pros and cons of the tax, though tackling the issue from different viewpoints. Danail Zhechev feared that its provisions would provoke general discontent among the population in times when social peace was most needed.¹⁴⁰ Dimitŭr Andreev described the sanctions against singles as "a harmful, criminal idea" with an ultimately fiscal target. Although firmly in favor of encouraging birth rates in Bulgaria, he believed that such unpopular sanctions would "sound like a false tune on a fairy-flute" and he feared the consequences.¹⁴¹ In contrast, Kiril Minkov brought up eugenic concerns, as in his words, after a certain age bachelors in Bulgaria could be recruited only among the contingents of mental and social psychopaths, and their reproduction was harmful rather than desired.¹⁴²

However, Gabrovski denied that the planned bachelors' tax was of a punitive nature. In his words, it was not meant to be a sanction against

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Speech of Danail Zhechev, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 44 M* (24 February 1943), pp. 946–947.

¹⁴¹ Speech of Dimitŭr Andreev, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), pp. 949–952.

¹⁴² Speech of Kiril Minkov, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), p. 954.

singles but a manifestation of social justice. Child support in general, and child support of large families in particular, could not be left on the shoulders of parents only, but was the nation's duty. Hence, every citizen had to contribute to it:

The nation is obliged to provide proper care for the children of large families, to create adequate conditions for their growth and health. By redistributing the financial burden for their care, the Bill in Support of Large Families will naturally take more from those who have less to worry about.¹⁴³

As bachelors held no responsibility toward children of their own, it would be “a most fair act” to make them pay more.¹⁴⁴ Gabrovski's reasoning harped on the concept of social solidarity, which had already gained popularity in Bulgarian society.

In the final Law, the bachelors' tax was scrapped and replaced with the provisions of the Decree for the 1935 State Budget, according to which families where both spouses were in state employment had five per cent of their income deducted in favor of the Large Families Fund in creation. Yet, in contrast to the 1935 provisions, the final Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families exempted women from taxation. No explanation for this was attached to this act.¹⁴⁵

4. The legal aftermath

On 31 March 1943 the Bill was codified by the National Assembly and came into force as the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families. Seven months later, on 25 October 1943, Gabrovski's successor, Minister Docho Khristov, proposed to amend it by removing the Department for Large Bulgarian families from the control of the Directorate of People's Health and subjecting it to the immediate administration of the Minister of the Interior and People's Health. None of the Law's provisions was altered, nor was

¹⁴³ Speech of Petür Gabrovski, in *Minutes of the XXVth ONA, IV RS, 45 M* (25 February 1943), p. 959.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ *The Laws for the People's Loan and for Large, Mnogodetni Bulgarian Families*, p. 21.

its welfare nature and pronatalist character questioned or challenged. The media remained silent about the Law's amendment and its further implementation, devoting their attention to the far more dramatic events in the international and domestic fields.

It was largely in this welfare form that the Law survived the dramatic events of 9 September 1944. After the introduction of compulsory civil marriages for all religious groups in Bulgaria in 1945, it had its "Bulgarian" requirements repealed, thus embracing all ethnic and religious communities in the country.¹⁴⁶ In May 1945, it became a fully integrated part of the legislation of the new political order.

¹⁴⁶ See "Naredba-Zakon za Izmenenie i Dopülnenie na Zakona za Mnogodetnite Bülgarski Semeistva" [Decree-Law for Amending and Supplementing the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families], *State Gazette*, No. 113 (18 May 1945), pp. 3–4.

CONCLUSIONS



This work has attempted to investigate the link between population trends, social policy, and the national good in one part of early twentieth-century Southeastern Europe. In particular, it has focused on the origins of Bulgaria's pronatalist policies, tracing them back to their roots in the country's pre-Communist past. It has sought to provide a detailed account of the evolution of Bulgaria's population concerns—from the country's qualitative concerns in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, to their rather pronounced, quantitative expression during the Second World War. In particular, this study is the first endeavor in the field of Bulgarian population and social policy to track the path and the logic of the actual laws passed regarding maternal and child healthcare, public assistance for children and especially the legal measures—proposed, enacted, or failed—to encourage large families which eventually would classify Bulgaria as a “pronatalist” country. The reasoning for the legislation has been presented as it was stated and perceived by the contemporary political and professional elites and hence reflects “the way they saw it.”

1. Legislation on the family and children (1918–1944)

The research has shown that significant attempts to introduce ideas of social hygiene in order to foster the creation of healthy and vigorous offspring were made already in the early 1920s, during the rule of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union. While the Bill for People's Health failed to pass due to the parliamentary opposition and, more significantly, because of the BANU's overthrow in June 1923, the ideology of social hygiene was legally implemented as part of the 1929 Health Law by Andrei Liapchev's cabinet of the Democratic Alliance government. In November 1940, the Health Law was further amended by the pro-German cabinet of Bogdan Filov, and

the initial means-tested conditions for free maternal and child health treatment were dropped in favor of universal and free provision of health care for all mothers and children in Bulgaria. The amendment coincided with a climate of enhanced pronatalist debates in society, which started in the late 1930s. It also ran parallel to the adoption of legislative measures to regulate intra-family and inter-generational relationships in 1938, 1940, and 1942, of which the amended Law for Children Born Outside Wedlock and their Avowal, and For Adoption (1940) also formed part. The climax of this accumulation of legislative policies in favor of children was the step-wise introduction of a family allowance scheme, first targeting the families of state officials (Law for Temporary Wage Increase of State Officials and Temporary Supplementary Family Subsidies, 1941) and then expanded to cover workers' children (Regulations for Family Allowances for Subsisting Workers' Children, 1942 and 1943). This eventually led to the enactment of the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families in March 1943.

2. An overview of motives—"the way they saw it"

Throughout the period, the motives behind the legislation enacted regarding child- and family-oriented public care and support continued to be justified as a complex of modernizing, socially appeasing, and internationally-sensitive considerations on the part of the Bulgarian state. Legislation on population and family policy represented an array of forward-looking political ventures aimed at rebuilding the country in the dismal aftermath of the two Balkan wars and the First World War, which had stripped Bulgaria of some of significant, nationally valuable territories and burdened her with heavy reparations. A strong and healthy labor force was seen by the Agrarians as imperative to revitalize and stimulate the ruined economy and restore the injured national spirit. The BANU believed that a labor-fit younger generation could by peaceful means revise the wrongs inflicted, purge the country of her aggressive military image on the international stage, and thereby propel Bulgaria to a position of equality amongst the other European nations. Similarly, as stated in the preamble to the 1929 Health Law of the Democratic Alliance, curbing infant mortality rates and spreading information about preventive health measures was a necessary precondition for regenerating the exhausted population and

ensuring a healthy and vigorous work force. Yet in the final 1929 Law, a strong work force was presented as a goal in itself, and less as a response to the immediate domestic requirements, national aspirations or far-reaching visions built around directing population trends. In fact, the 1929 Law had a complex provenance. Parliamentary debates reveal that it was recognized as a "legal transplant" into Bulgaria's legal structure, i.e., an effort to import a piece of American health legislation into the country. This move was dictated by the need to ensure cooperation between Bulgaria and the financially and politically powerful Rockefeller Foundation and thus break through Bulgaria's international isolation after her collapse in the First World War. Child and families issues were not necessarily always of direct interest to Liapchev's liberal cabinet, but rather a political vehicle to restore the country's benign image in the international arena. Simultaneously, the adoption of a liberal healthcare system based on individual payments and (virtually non-existent) charity contributions freed the state from further welfare responsibilities.

A distinct reversal in state attitudes towards the family and children developed in the second half of the 1930s under the impact of continuously high infant mortality rates and the onset of a plummeting birth rate—a new phenomenon in Bulgaria's population history. Simultaneously, pronatalist concerns were growing with the increasing threat of a new world war, though the country was maneuvering politically to avoid it. Expectations for peaceful revisionism of the Neuilly Peace Treaty, however, were widely entertained and hopes for eventually uniting the territorially divided nation were high. While pronatalist debates permeated the media, official state and public representatives employed pronatalist rhetoric to accentuate the need for enhanced public assistance, based upon principles of social justice and social solidarity, to counter growing economic destitution among the population and to "cement" domestic peace. Against the background of nationalistic legislation to promote and favor Bulgarianness, which was forced upon the country from the outside, i.e., by her German war ally (but conceivably also, to avoid interference with politically sensitive Muslim issues in Bulgaria), emphasis was placed (implicitly rather than explicitly) on the fertility decline of the Bulgarian ethnic population. Racist issues, however, were rarely articulated in society and never became an explicit target of family legislation.

With few exceptions, Bulgarian statesmen and public opinion alike acknowledged the country's poor economic circumstances as the true fac-

tors underlying progressive fertility decline, and saw problems such as abortion and a growing trend to celibacy as a consequence of the dire economic situation. Hence, regulation of contraception and birth control was not included among the objectives of the Law for Large Bulgarian Families, while the initial ideas for bachelors' taxation were abandoned, opposed by both the public and the Parliament.

Research into Bulgaria's first pronatalist law demonstrates that its extensive provisions were part of a broader welfare program initiated by Filov's government to ensure to the stability of both society and the state under economically and, above all, politically demanding wartime circumstances. Pronatalist provisions were combined with positive welfare legislation, such as exemption of the needy from paying church fees at marriage, state-provided low-interest marriage loans, school and transport subsidies, employment privileges for members of large families with three or more children, and tax and compulsory labor concessions for child-rich fathers. Simultaneously, welfare measures became part of the state's consciously utilized array of devices to appease society, subject personal needs to state requirements, impose domestic order and guarantee state security. Politically, unstable conditions in the "newly-liberated" territories, as along with the looming communist threat in the mother-country, were seen as the two main potential sources of social unrest. Equally, economic hardship, aggravated by the presence of a pro-Soviet Communist Party inspired by revolutionary tactics and ideologies, had been an acknowledged driving force for the BANU in the early 1920s to initiate a strong welfare-targeted program. Ironically, two years after its implementation in 1943, the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families was extended by the new communist regime to all ethnic communities in the country and was thus integrated into the pronatalist legislation of Bulgaria's post-1945 communist era.

3. Privileged and underprivileged target groups of social legislation

Against the background of Bulgaria's pronatalist specifics—directed at promoting family welfare policies first and population objectives second—negative eugenic considerations played but an insignificant role in social

and parliamentary debates. In practice, the concept of “degeneration” overlapped with the idea of “depopulation” and so avoided assuming the sinister meaning of being biologically or racially “unfit.” The term “race” itself was applied in legal and parliamentary documents to denote the “nation” as a whole, and the few references to ethnic selectivity were the utterances of a limited number of right-wing ideologues preoccupied with military fears. An ethnically or “biologically” hierarchical mental map did not crystallize in the parliamentary debates.

Within this frame of reasoning, the introduction into civil law of compulsory premarital examination certificates, meant to discourage epileptics and syphilitics from matrimony, did not stir the political and public sphere of discourse or interest. For long, premarital health certificates had been a traditional part of the matrimonial requirements of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and as long as marriages of syphilitics and epileptics were similarly discouraged under Church regulations, it is possible that the intentional institutional overlap in nuptial requirements represented just another (abortive) state attempt to introduce civil marriage into society. This line of speculation, however, needs further investigation and proof.

Moreover, while marriages of “asocial” groups were discouraged by withdrawing economic privileges from them, these groups were not explicitly banned from entering into marriage. Significantly, extreme negative eugenic measures such as sterilization, castration, or enforced abortion were never placed on the parliamentary agenda, nor did they become the subject of legislative initiatives.

No restrictions were imposed by the Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Families on the reproduction of the antisocial (convicted criminals), as, in an act of humane consideration, Bulgarian legislators rejected the assumption of inherited delinquency and collective guilt transmitted down the generations. Yet, contradicting themselves, Bulgarian legislators ruled out children born outside marriage from state support and state benefits, thus turning reproduction into a moral issue, restricted within the framework of a legal marriage. Earlier attempts to modernize, i.e., to “Europeanize,” social views with regard to illegitimate offspring had also failed, shattered likewise on the rock of traditional Bulgarian morality.

Gender issues with respect to women’s employment and the reproduction of the race, though present in the media discourse of the right, did

not surface in parliamentary debates. Bulgaria's predominantly agricultural society might have *a priori* precluded discriminatory legal steps against female labor; yet it is equally likely that the advancing threat of the Second World War and the shortage of male labor might have contributed to the adoption of a gender-neutral, "parental" allowance system, favoring all employees equally. Within the framework of kinship relations, however, Bulgaria's family allowance scheme manifested a distinct, "native" peculiarity: it legitimated the concept of the extended, three-generational family, and in the process expanded the scope of child benefits to grandparents and relatives.

4. Political participants and pressure activists

Both right- and left-wing political and social figures became actively involved in the population and welfare debate. Fertility anxieties were first voiced in a period infamous for its authoritarian spirit. It was an officially pro-German government and a compliant "government" Parliament which passed the Law for Large Bulgarian Families. Yet, leftist political forces, such as the representatives of the Agrarian factions, of the Social Democrats, but only occasionally representatives of the Workers' Party (the legal manifestation of the Bulgarian Communist Party), also played an active part in the public and parliamentary disputes on fertility, children and family welfare. Some of them, such as the Social Democrat Prof. Iliia Ianulov, the BANU members Dr Vera Zlatareva and her husband Mikhail Genovski, as well as the communist, Tsvetana Kiranova, continued their professional and also political career in the post-1944 aftermath. So did Prof. Petko Stainov, an active opponent of the 1929 Health Law, as well as the notorious Kimon Georgiev, organizer of the 1934 coup, under whose leadership the Law for Public Assistance was introduced. It is noteworthy that the state itself, as represented by its government and administrative structures, placed greater value on the population and welfare discourse of the "left." While extremely conservative, right-wing views, too, had a voice in society, they were underrepresented in the official state journals, and discouraged by silent censorship during the Second World War.

5. Aftermath

The Law for Large, *Mnogodetni* Bulgarian Families was further amended by Decree-Law on 18 May 1945, to be repealed later, along with all pre-9 September 1944 legislation, in November 1951. Yet a replacement law was soon introduced to provide protection for mothers and children, while in December 1967 the Council of Ministers announced a pronatalist program aimed at stimulating the country's birth rate. In February 1968, the Decree for the Encouragement of Birth Rates was published, and nearly twenty years later, in 1985, the latter was reiterated and further elaborated in the 1985 Family Code. While the motivations behind the Communist state's pronatalist campaigns are a matter for further archival investigations, it should be nevertheless acknowledged that pronatalist policies in post-1944 and post-1990 Bulgaria are a continuation rather than a novel departure in modern Bulgarian history. As such, they attest the long history of the state's attempts to respond to domestic needs and serve the national cause.

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INDEX

- Alliance Nationale pour l'Accroissement de
 la Population Française, 183
 Altemirski, Ivan, 169–170
 American Medical Association, 65
 American Red Cross, 62
 Andreev, Dimitŭr, 242
 Andreev, N., 64, 73
 Angelov, Simeon, 101, 114–119
 Angelova, Iurdanka, 188
 Apostolov, Ivan, 189, 190n96
 Association of Bulgarian Solicitors, 20, 208,
 227, 231–232, 235
 Association for Hygiene and Preventive
 Medicine, 77
 Association for People's Health, 128, 129n7,
 130
 Association of the Bulgarian Journalists, 176

 Bagrianov, Ivan, 172–173
 Bakŭrdzhiev, Todor, 204
 Barbara, Paola, 120
 Beckerle, Adolf, 209n7
 Belev, Aleksandŭr, 209n
 Berenger, Rene, 114
 Berlin Association for Racial Hygiene, 49
 Beron, Bogomil, 110, 110n109
 Bertillion, Jacques, 183n67
 Beshkov, Ivan, 211n19
 Bochev, Zakhari, 75
 Bozhilov, Dobri, 91–92, 190, 233
 Brannik [Defender], 28
 Bŭchvarov, Gercho, 85
 Bulgarian Anti-Alcohol Federation, 177
 Bulgarian Association for Social Progress, 20,
 208, 227, 231–232, 235
 Bulgarian Association of University Women,
 241n133
 Bulgarian Dermatological Association, 49
 Bulgarian Independent Temperance Union,
 241n133
 Bulgarian Red Cross, 75
 Bulgarian Union against Tuberculosis, 177
 Bulgarian Union for Child Protection, 20,
 63n78, 75, 75n132, 77, 120, 122, 156, 177,
 226
 Bulgarian Women's Union, 20, 30, 57n58,
 86, 86n10, 112, 112n118, 113, 120, 150,
 157n122, 175 n36, 226
 Bumke, Oswald, 148, 148n92
 Burilkov, Dimo, 128, 177, 183, 185

 Chankov, Zheko, 128, 128n4
 Commissariat for Jewish Issues, 209n7
 Committee for Bulgarian Literature, 171
 Comte, Auguste, 219n50
 Constant, Benjamin, 105

 Daladier, Edouard, 183, 183n64
 Danailov, Georgi, 150, 150n97, 158
 Daskalov, Boris, 164–166
 Daskalov, Raiko, 43, 46, 50, 53
 Daskalov, Teodosii, 175, 177–178
 Dawson, Lord, 186
 de Pr  ameneu, Bigotn, J.J., 104
 de Toqueville, Alexis, 219n50
 del Vecchio, Salvatore, 138
 Detelinov, 121
 Dikov, Liuben, 107, 107n96
 Dimov, Damian, 158
 Dolapchiev, N., 122
 Dolinski, Nikolai, 198–199
 Draganov, Georgi, 156–157
 Drandarevski, 164
 Durkheim, Emile, 219n50

- East European Red Cross Organizations, 110
- Enchev, G., 79
- Fichev, Ivan, 38
- Filov, Bogdan, 30, 30 f85, 94, 148, 173, 175, 178, 191, 207–209, 210n8, 211, 211n19, 212, 222, 228, 228n71, 231n88, 232, 245, 248
- Forel, Auguste, 109
- Gabrovski, Petŭr, 130n17, 142, 142n66, 173–175, 178, 200, 205, 207–208, 209nn6–7, 210, 210nn8–9, 211, 211nn15–19, 212–215, 217–224, 226–227, 228n69, 232–234, 238, 242–243
- Gatev, 164
- Genovski, Mikhail, 241n133, 250
- Georgiev, Kimon, 30, 32, 86, 86n12, 215
- Geraskov, Mikhail, 154, 154nn110, 112, 155–156
- Geshev, Nikola, 211n15
- Gianturco, Emmanuele, 107
- Girginov, Aleksandŭr, 36–37, 88
- Golemanova, Rada, 157, 157n122
- Golesmanov (Golesmanoff), Ivan, 54, 55n49
- Gorarov, Ivan, 193, 193n109
- Gracchi, Cornelia, 159
- Gracchi, Tiberius and Gaius, 159, 159n134
- Guardians of the Advancement of the Bulgarian National Spirit, 208, 208n6
- Gunev, K., 228n69
- Gunn, Selskar M., 63, 65n86
- Ianulov, Illia, 131, 131n21, 152–153, 187, 196, 250
- International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, 113n118
- International Bureau for Labor Protection, 90
- International Federation of University Women, 241n133
- International Health Board of the Rockeller Foundation, 62, 63
- International Labor Organization, 37, 90
- International Save-the-Children Union, 77, 88, 131
- International Union Against Tuberculosis (and Lung Disease), 131, 131n19
- Iordanov, Anto, 238
- Iotov, Ivan, 210
- Iotov, M., 211n19.
- Iurdanov, Todor, 172–173
- Ivan A., 239
- Ivanov, Boris, 239
- Ivanova, Dimitrana, 20, 112, 112n118, 122, 150, 151
- Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene, 65, 65n86, 66
- Kantardzhiev, Asen, 209
- Kesiakov, Ivan, 58, 65
- Khristov, Docho, 211, 211n18, 19, 243
- King Boris, 28, 63, 175, 178n49, 181, 208, 209n8, 231
- King Ferdinand, 28, 44, 85
- Kioseivanov, Georgi, 30, 177–178, 178n49
- Kiranov (Kiranoff), Prokopi, 175n36
- Kiranova, Tsvetana, 173, 175, 175n36, 250
- Kirilov, Ivan, 169–170
- Koichev, Gencho, 89
- Koichev, Nikola, 65, 65n86, 68–70, 75–77
- Kollwitz, Käthe, 69, 69n108
- Komitski, Geo, 182
- Konsulov, Stefan, 131, 141–146, 148, 148n92, 149–150, 152, 177, 210
- Kozhuhkharov, Illia, 107, 109–110
- Kozhukharov (Kojuharoff), Aleksandŭr, 100
- Krŭstev, Todor, 106n91
- Lazard, Max, 48
- Le Play, Frederic, 219n50
- League of Nations, 23n62, 25, 48, 75n132, 146
- League of Red Cross Societies, 131
- League of Sanitary Workers, 177
- Lebedev-Bogar, G. I., 131
- Leroy-Beaulieu, P., 140
- Liapchev, Andrei, 29–30, 58, 61, 64, 66, 73–74, 78, 88, 150, 196, 245, 247

- Liapcheva, Konstantsa, 88
 Logofetov, Nikola, 177
 Lolov, Atanas, 174
 Lukov, Khristo, 208
 Lulchev, Kosta, 73
 Lulchev, Liubomir, 208n2, 210n8
- Marinov, Dimitŭr, 102
 Markov, Georgi, 176, 176n40
 Midilev, Petŭr, 88, 88n23
 Mikhailovski, Stoian, 46
 Milenov, D., 192
 Minkov, Kiril, 242
 Mishaikov, Dimitŭr, 101, 128n4, 133, 133n27, 135, 135n37, 136, 136n44, 137, 137n44, 138n52, 140–141, 218, 218n47
 Mishakov, Khristo, 149
 Mitakov, Vasil, 108, 119, 124, 166, 177, 177n43, 192, 202
 Mollov, Dimitŭr, 52
 Moskov, Ivan, 110, 153–154
 Muletarov, Vasil, 51n34
 Muraviev, Konstantin, 211n15.
 Mushanov, Nikola, 57, 210n10
- Near East Relief (Foundation), 62, 62n78
 Nedev, Nikola, 80–81, 162, 162n148, 170, 177
 Neofit Vidinski, 87, 227
 Nikiforov, Stoian, 176, 176n39, 186
 Nikolaev, Nikolai, 87–88
 Nikolov, Nikolai, 90
 Novachev, Khristo, 169–170
- Orahovats, Petŭr, 52
- Padarev, Dragomir, 174, 222
 Padev, Mikhail, 207n1
 Paediatricians' Association, 77
 Pelovski, T., 160
 Penchev, Angel, 241–242
 Peshev, Dimitŭr, 209n7, 210n8, 227
 Petrov, G., 66–68, 76.
 Petrov, Todor, 169–170
 Petrovski, 239
 Popov, Georgi, 158
 Popov, Ivan, 175
 Popov, Mincho, 56
 Popova-Mutafova, Fani, 161, 161n143
 Prinzing, Friedrich, 139
- Queen Eleanor Reuss of Kostritz, 85, 85n7, 86
- Radio "Sofia," 19, 132, 132n24, 157.
 Radkov, Rusi, 130, 130n17, 131, 65, 65n85, 73–74
 Rafailov, 211n19.
 Rainov, Zakhari, 172
 Rampone, President, 184
 Reichsbund der Kinderreichen, 189
 Rivet, Gustave, 114
 Rockefeller Foundation, 62–64, 65nn85–86, 71n113, 81, 130–131, 247
 Rousseau, J.J., 139
 Rusev, Ivan, 161
 Rusev, Marin, 52
 Russell, Frederick, 63
- Saparev, 51n34
 Saradzhov, Dimitŭr, 166, 174, 189, 189n90, 192, 217, 218n48, 219–221, 242
 Savov, S., 73
 Schellenberg, Walter, 210
 School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 75n133
 Scialoja, Vittorio, 107
 Shanov, Botio, 158
 Shishmanov, Ivan, 30n87
 Shumanov, Vasil, 151, 152, 152n104, 156
 Simeon, crown-prince, 232
 Sinigov, Angel, 93
 Sirakov, Penka and Todor, 239
 Sofronii, Bishop, 177
 Staikov, Gavril, 173
 Stainov, Petko, 65n85, 104–106, 210n9, 250
 Stamboliiski, Aleksandŭr, 44, 44n8, 45, 45n10, 46, 46nn15–17, 48nn22–24, 50, 55n49, 56n57, 57, 57n58, 58, 63–64, 84n3, 176n40
 Statkov, Stoian, 173
 Stefanov, Mincho, 238
 Stoev, K., 172, 172n20

- Stoianchev, Ts., 53
 Stoianov, P.D., 203
 Strundzhev, Zhiko, 124
 Sultan Mahmud, 52
 Šutej, Juraj, 184
- Todorov, Georgi, 124n161
 Todorova, Liuba, 155n122, 157
 Tomov, Kosta, 72, 72n118, 73, 84, 84n3, 176n40
 Tonchev, Dimitŭr, 103, 103n76
 Tsanev, Asen, 89–90, 95, 95n54, 97, 99
 Tsankov, Aleksandŭr, 29–30, 84n3, 137n44, 161, 210, 219, 236, 242
 Tsankov, Stefan, 49
 Tsanov, Stefan, 164
 Tsonev, Petko, 176, 178
- United State's Children's Bureau, 65
- Vachov, Konstantin, 101, 104–106
 Vasilev, Bogdan, 182
- Vatev, Stoian, 77, 177
 Vazov, Ivan (Dr), 211n19
 Velkov, Pelin, 160
 Venev, Stoian, 76, 76n137
 Vladimirov, L.E., 110
- Women's International League for Peace, 70n108
- Zagorov (Zagoroff), Slavcho, 75–76, 132–133, 133nn26–28, 134, 134n33, 135, 135n37, 136, 136n44, 138, 138n52, 139–141, 144, 155–156, 218, 218n47, 219
 Zakhariev, Zakhari, 76, 130, 161.
 Zanardelli, Guiseppe, 107
 Zarev, Stefan, 89–90, 95, 95n54, 97, 99.
 Zhechev, Danail, 242
 Zhekov, Zakhari, 131, 169–174, 176–181, 184, 189–193, 200, 202–204
 Zlatarska, Vera, 240, 240n133, 250
 Zlatarski, Nikola, 103, 107–108, 110–112

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